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Preaching By Laymen

WORKS BY

OZORA S. DAVIS

President Chicago Theological Seminary

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Preaching By Laymen

A Study of the Elementary Principles of Presenting the Gospel

By

OZORA S. DAVIS

President Chicago Theological Seminary

Author of "Evangelistic Preaching," "Preaching the Social Gospel," etc.

With Introduction by
ROGER W. BABSON

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Introduction

A STUDY of church statistics suggests very clearly that the growth and influence of the Church has always been proportional to the amount and character of its lay preaching. Whenever there has been little lay preaching, the Church has grown but little. When there has been much lay preaching, the Church has grown rapidly. Lay preaching is one of the best barometers of the basic condition of the churches. Buildings, endowments, numbers, even benevolences, are not the true barometers of religious growth, but rather how we live and to what extent we are giving testimony to others.

One of the best tests of an ordained minister's true power is his ability to induce others to preach the Gospel. The average preacher makes the mistake of being content to be a *salesman* of the Gospel when he should be a *sales-manager*. There is a great difference. The struggling country storekeeper attempts to be a salesman, although he often falls far short of deserving even this title. In order to become a real merchant he must *teach others* to sell,—in fact his so doing automatically makes him a real merchant. Many preachers are failing, today, because they are content to be little shopkeepers, when they might be great merchants of the Gospel. To be such a merchant a preacher must have many "salesmen," or lay preachers, working for him.

A study of young men shows that their efficiency is very largely determined by their willingness to preach the Gospel. This does not mean, necessarily, the use of Bible texts nor even the engaging in pulpit work. It may consist of teaching in the church school, of activity in Christian Endeavor or Y. M. C. A. work, or in other forms of Gospel service. A man is seldom able to grow, as he should, without doing a certain amount of lay preaching. For my closest personal business associates I have chosen men who are active in church work. Leroy D. Peavey, the Vice-President of the Babson Statistical Organization, spends his vacations doing direct evangelistic work. When men come to us for employment, we not only ask them if they *go* to church, but also if they *work* there. Lay preaching develops men along efficient lines more than any one thing.

Possibly I use the word "preaching" in a broader way than does President Davis. Whenever one is attempting to better the motives, purposes and ambitions of men and women, he is preaching the Gospel. Many Rotary and Kiwanis Club men are to-day very effective lay preachers. They may know nothing about theology and little about the Bible; but they have a logical directness and feeling which enables them to put across the Gospel message. Most of these men owe their position in life to the Church. If the Church did not directly start them in life, they owe much to a

praying father or praying mother. Certainly the churches are asleep to let these men get away. Yes; these men are lay preachers of the Gospel and should be working directly in connection with the churches instead of with some institutions outside them. If the churches were not asleep, there would be no room for Rotary Clubs and similar organizations. The Gospel is being preached, to-day, more than ever, but the lay preachers are not being sent out by the churches.

Chapters five and six of this most useful book especially appeal to me. Experience clearly teaches that the greatest development of the next century will be the power derived from prayer and the harnessing of spiritual forces. Prayer is the oldest of non-physical forces, yet is to-day almost dormant. Prayer has the possibility of revolutionizing the world, and yet is available to all. When this force is released, it is as available to the layman as to the college and seminary graduate. The greatest leaders to-day are praying men. They may not be church members, they may even swear and do other unconventional things—but they are *praying* men. I know whereof I speak. Any reader of this book who does not succeed at lay preaching should carefully read the chapter on " Prayer and Preaching."

Yet what pleases me most about this book is that its author is sane and well-balanced. He recognizes that genius is largely hard work. He emphasizes the great need of careful preparation, and

then *more* preparation. He insists that there should be a logical, and simple proposition for each address. He shows how material may be systematically collected, and how the address may be developed. He treats of thinking, reading, writing, memorizing and illustrating. This is a practical book treating both of the emotions which are the mainspring of great leaders; and of the every-day tools which they must use—such as card-filing, clipping envelopes, and the useful follow-up.

In closing, permit me to congratulate President Davis on chapter eighteen of his book, entitled "Casting the Net." The great majority of preachers who fail do so because they are unwilling to cast the net. How long would any salesman keep his job if he did not get names "on the dotted line"? No sales-manager would be successful who did not insist that his men "bring home the bacon." A real man of business counts not the number of calls made, or the number of words spoken by his men, but the orders secured. Yet many, many preachers, both lay and ministerial, refuse to pass around the order blanks and ask for signatures. Ah! not only is the greatest thing in life the winning of souls to Jesus Christ, but the only way to win them is through urging men and women to take definite and immediate action. "*Now* is the accepted time."

ROGER W. BABSON.

Babson Park, Mass.

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I

THE MODERN DEMAND FOR PREACHING

The Permanent Power of Public Address

OCCASIONALLY we hear that preaching is "played out." We are told that Smith doesn't go to church chiefly because Smith is tired to death of sermons. At the same time the defender of almost any cause, provided only that he is dead in earnest about it and is not too offensive in manner, can secure an audience at any street corner; the Chautauqua tent is crowded; the man with a real message does get a hearing. Can it be that the Church is the great exception and the message which is commonly known as the Gospel is the only one that humanity is sick of hearing? The facts do not warrant the conclusion. Public speech is still the greatest single agency through which ideas are spread abroad. The speaker is still master of the old fascination and power. What we need is not less preaching but more; more preaching and better; and more men and women at it, at it more of the time, and at it with better training and preparation

for their happy and rewarding labour. We need ordained preachers; but, no less, we need lay preachers.

Varied Factors in Preaching

One of the problems in modern preaching arises from the fact that it is still held too rigidly within the functions of a highly trained and specialized class, the ordained ministry of the Christian churches. Immediately we would explain this apparently dogmatic and radical proposition. We do not mean that preaching does not require a high degree of specialized preparation in order that it may be done in the best way; but we mean that preaching is too big a business to be restricted today to the clergy alone. Preaching is a task that admits of many forms of expression. It must not be restricted to any one group in the Christian fellowship. To hamper it thus is to fail in securing the largest advantage of the Christian Church in the modern world. The unordained membership of the Church is still under the primitive and unrepealed obligation to preach.

The distinction is historic, however. After the first few Christian centuries had passed preaching was marked by two distinct phases. There was the more formal statement of the Gospel by men set apart for the office by some sacred rite; the discourse was classed as a " sermon," included in

an order of public worship and therefore derived definite characteristics from that fact. A science grew up from the preparation and delivery of sermons known technically as Homiletics. Preaching became a ministerial or priestly function.

On the other hand the place and power of another activity was recognized, namely, the less formal statement of the Gospel by persons who never had been set apart for this particular work, the discourse generally being a part of a simple order of exercises in a public meeting, in which, however, the sermon or address occupied the chief place. This has been known as lay-preaching. At certain periods in the history of the Church this activity has become especially prominent and has invariably been attended by an increase in the influence of the Christian Gospel in the life of the generation. In England the work of laymen in preaching has always been given more prominence than it has in America. But the energy of the Church always must be expressed through the work of its unordained witness-bearers, who preach as the Apostles did, because they are aflame with love and conviction. We need spend no moment in apology for the preaching work of men and women in the modern Church.

The Pressure of the Modern Parish

Stories of the old days when the minister in

dressing-gown and slippers spent his undisturbed mornings pondering high themes of divinity sound like fairy tales to the pastor of a modern church. The congestion of work in the minister's day has gone too far; it is complex and incessant; in some way relief must be found. One solution of the problem is by enlarging the staff of salaried executives and thus dividing the labour more economically. The average Protestant church is not adequately furnished with technical workers; of that there can be no doubt. Again, the problem is attacked at the point of more careful organization of parish work, making only one job grow where two had grown before. Many a parish is so poorly organized that there is much duplication of effort; thorough efficiency methods would be of great assistance in many cases; but it is seldom that permanent relief is found in this way. It is like building more subways in New York to relieve the congestion in surface and elevated lines only to discover that normal travel has so increased in the meantime that the problem is not solved at all. The new workers make more work and the simplified system creates more tasks. Where is relief from parish congestion to be finally found?

Undeveloped Resources in Volunteer Workers

The desired relief from modern parish pressure will be found only in utilizing the undeveloped

resources in the Church itself to perform fully all the functions of the Christian organism in the community. We hardly understand a fraction of the energies that lie latent in the rank and file of the average church, like unharnessed torrents still pouring through mountain cañons and waiting for control and direction in order to turn the great dynamos that will yield light and power to needy places far away. There is a mischievous comma in the current translations of Ephesians 4: 12, where it is said that officers were given to the church " for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ," as if here were three coördinate sets of duties to which church leaders are divinely appointed. As a matter of fact, however, these commas are false guides if they convey any such impression. The work of the office-bearers in any church is to make all the members of the church effective in the whole ministering work for the community, thus edifying the entire group. Real ministry is never wholly or permanently in the hands of a salaried clergy; it is the primary obligation of all the saints, into the full discharge of which the officers of the church give guidance and encouragement.

So the best way in which to solve every problem of parish congestion is to call into full play the energies of the laymen and set them vigorously to

the "work of ministering." The application of this principle to the kinds of administrative work to which men are naturally adapted is seen immediately. The finance committee is to be manned; new phases of fellowship in a social way are to be developed; the civic life of the community is to be brought under the sway of Christian principle. Men will respond to these calls readily. There is a still larger claim to be made upon the laymen, however; they must assume their responsibility for the devotional life and for preaching. This is a somewhat startling statement; it will not be received happily or eagerly at first by many members of Christian churches. The pr n is valid, nevertheless. There must be a renewal of the work of laymen in the conduct of public meetings and in simple, earnest gospel preaching before the Christian churches in America will meet the responsibilities of the new day.

The Problem of Enlistment

The first step in the solution of the problem of parish pressure, therefore, is the task of convincing the members of the church of their responsibility for public meetings and preaching and their definite enlistment in the work. The minister himself will be forced to assume the chief burden on this program at the outset. He will be obliged to talk the proposition through with his key men,

speak of it in public, even preach on the subject, and keep everlastingly at it until he convinces and converts his people to the truth. The church membership as a whole must come to see their responsibility for giving their Christian testimony in all kinds of talks, addresses and sermons, in all kinds of meetings held under the auspices of the church. This is essential to the experience of being a disciple or follower of Christ; there is no escape from the obligation.

It may be admitted here as well as later that there are ministers and church officers, especially some of those occupying the highest positions within the councils of the Church, who are not convinced that the extension of the preaching function to laymen is warranted or desirable. Their strong conviction is one of the reasons why there is so little of this vital activity among the laymen of America, in comparison, for example, with the conditions that obtain in England. This is not the place in which to draw out the argument. We believe that this position is not well taken and that the influence of the Church would be vastly strengthened if they would encourage and guide the preaching of laymen in the United States.

The problem of enlistment, even in the case of those ministers who believe in the larger use of laymen in all kinds of preaching, is difficult and delicate. In the first place, as we have noted, the

case must be made out for the proposition. Then the men must be carefully selected. Then the right kind of work for them to do must be developed. Then their own decision to assume the task must be secured. All this is possible; perhaps a minister never will do a more significant and lasting piece of work in his parish than just to enlist a small group of laymen who will conduct meetings under church auspices and preach in the plain and direct way of which the layman is generally master.

The Problem of Instruction or Training

Suppose, now, for the sake of the statement to follow, that a minister, or group of earnest laymen, has found a certain number of members of the parish who are ready to accept the service of what may be called a "Gospel Team." It is no light task to find such a group and unite them in a specific campaign or program of work. Certainly they ought not to be left to work out their problem without guidance and counsel. The minister, in case he has received the usual training for his work, spent many years in preparation. He has worked hard on his sermon. He knows that while it is possible to do a certain kind of lazy-minded preaching easily, if only he is a fluent talker, and "get away with it" successfully at least for a time, real preaching is a highly technical

and difficult task. He must stand by his laymen if they are to speak at meetings held in a larger parish. He must have material which is especially adapted to the problem which he is seeking to solve with his men. He must work with them patiently to train them through practical engagement with the actual work of giving talks, addresses and sermons.

The Purpose and Method of This Book

We have prepared this hand-book in the earnest effort to meet this practical need of the Christian ministers and laymen of America. During the Christian centuries, as preaching has gone on, there has developed a technique which is known as *Homiletics* and there are scores of books in the field. These may be had from any well-equipped library. But they are designed for candidates for "orders" of various kinds in the Church. They often presume a previous degree of training in college. In the case of certain smaller volumes they are sometimes painfully "written down" both in size and quality from the larger books, a kind of peptonized theory of preaching in words of one syllable.

Meantime there are many groups of laymen, for example, members of the active society of Gideons, Gospel Teams, groups of college students doing most valuable deputation work during vacation,

hundreds of young men in the Y. M. C. A., and mission workers of all kinds, who need a guide in the work that they are undertaking. These men are seeking to exert through oral address such influence upon their comrades as will lead them into actual friendship with Jesus. In the fine phrase of a book of great value, they want to "introduce men to Jesus Christ."

We have in mind still another situation, however. Under the influence of an actual program of parish evangelism, such as nearly all the various churches are now seeking to carry out, many a minister is sure to find that he has a group in his church that has become fully aroused to the part that they must play in the expansion of Christianity in their city or neighbourhood or community. The influence of the winter's preaching will have kindled the old Apostolic passion for testifying in the hearts of at least a small group of laymen. He must have something in the form of a handbook which this group can use, perhaps under his teaching leadership, perhaps singly or by the group collectively, which will give immediate and practical help. It is to supply this need that the following chapters have been written. They have been prepared in view of this concrete situation. Much of the material has been discussed by such a group of lay workers. We have designedly kept the form of direct address in many paragraphs.

Nothing is given here that has not been tested and used. We are confident that ministers or groups will find that they are on solid ground with the directions and suggestions.

Underlying all the material here given are certain fundamental convictions. First, that the laymen who are going to preach successfully must be tremendously in earnest about it and humbly willing to learn how to do their work well. They must be patient and not easily discouraged. Then they must be constantly alert in mind and heart and will, aroused and sustained by the bigness and the worth of their task. They must be vital to their finger-tips as well as devout and humble. Finally, they must work not less but even harder than the clergyman who has been trained for his work in college and theological school. The task is not too hard. It is glorious. It has within it rewards and satisfactions that can be found nowhere else in the ranges of Christian experience.

II

THE GOSPEL AND PREACHING

Old Words with New Meanings

IT is a rewarding use of time and mind to review now and then the meaning of familiar words. They grow dull by constant usage; they need to be polished up and reflected upon. Two such words, worn down by much repetition among Christians, are *the Gospel* and *Preaching.* Therefore we take time at the beginning of this manual to review and renew our consciousness of what we actually mean when we use the words.

The Gospel is defined clearly in the New Testament in its primitive Christian meaning. It is the good news of a new life for the individual and for all the world, which is to be realized through faith in Christ and as a result of which humanity is to be reconciled or restored to God and to itself. There are many ways of stating this; the one given above may be amplified or the factors in it may be changed. Every thoughtful Christian must have his own conception of the Gospel. It must not omit the factors that are essential; it must correspond not only to the first idea as defined in the New Testament, but it must reckon with all the

enlarged scope that has been given to the word as Christian experience has been enriched and deepened. Therefore let us seek an answer to such questions as these:

What Is Your Definition of the Christian Gospel?

After you have written it, review it in every item, questioning whether each is vital to the whole idea, and whether you have them all stated in their true proportion.

How Has Your Conception of the Gospel Changed Since You First Used the Word?

That is, does the Gospel mean the same to you that it did when you first heard your parents use the word; or when you first began to understand it in sermons heard by you as a child? What has altered the content of the term, if it has been changed? And is there any reason to expect that other modifications of the word will arise in the future? Should we expect changes; and if so, how shall we test their validity?

The import of the above suggestion for thought and study will disclose the truth that we must not handle words unless we understand what they mean and try to use them in the *vital* rather than the *stereotyped* form. The Christian worker must be constantly thinking through his terms and his problems. If he does not, he will soon be in the

midst of a dull, treadmill job, and all life and joy will disappear from it. It is better to sit down and think hard for half an hour than it is to read what someone else has thought for two hours. We shall come to this principle again and give it still stronger emphasis.

Now as we study the activity of the Christian people we find that it takes many forms. It is as big and as busy a matter to be a Christian as it is to live. To follow Jesus as Master and Lord means to have our entire personality committed to the whole business of living. Nothing less than this will meet the demands of true Christian discipleship.

The Paramount Importance of Preaching in Christian Action

There is one Christian activity, however, which appeared at the very beginning, has continued in unbroken sequence through all the centuries, and is to-day one of the principal engagements of the Christian in his individual as well as all the group expressions of his personality. It is the publication or the expression of the Gospel, especially through oral address, for the purpose of introducing men to Christ and bringing the Kingdom of God to more complete realization. This is Christian preaching.

The principal factor in this activity is the giving

of evidence or the task and privilege of witnessing. There are other items in the process; but this is one of the chief factors if not the principal element that enters into preaching.

It is usual to think of preaching as consisting primarily in the announcement or the statement of truth in reasoned and convincing terms. To preach is to state the Christian message or to affirm and discuss the propositions of the Christian religion. This is a large factor in preaching. Perhaps it is the one that is most often recognized and worked out. But there is something else in the process that is still more fundamental. It is the factor of personal testimony. We do not merely state a truth that has been defined to or accepted by our minds. We are the preachers of something that has been accepted by us with all our being and has been built into our experience. So we are not so much reasoning about something as we are affirming a truth that has been approved by our whole life. This is so important a matter that we shall take it up later at some length. We must pass on now to consider certain other aspects of preaching which are of vital concern to us.

Preaching and the Preacher

First, then, a few words in consideration of the relation between preaching and personality. We impute ourselves in all that we do, and any work-

man is represented in his work. As we rise in the scale of importance of service the worth of personality increases. In teaching, for example, or in carrying on the philanthropic activities of the world, the personal factor grows more and more dominant. It is impossible to think of successful teaching apart from a constant investment of personal values. The relations of the teacher and pupil must involve the generous gift of one self to another.

This fact comes to its supreme expression in Christian preaching. Here the personal factor assumes critical proportions. If the sermon or any other statement of the Gospel designed to win a verdict in its favour does not have behind it the full weight of the speaker's personal confidence and confirmation it will fail. Even a poor statement of truth that is backed by a glowing personal faith secures a conviction and consent that a far more perfect statement would fail to win if there was scanty personal confidence to back it up. Keep this fact in the forefront of your thinking when you reflect upon the forces that will win in modern preaching. To be keenly alive to the meaning of the truth, sure and happy about it, is the inevitable temper which alone can bring final achievement.

The Place of Preparation in Preaching

Sometimes it is claimed that the preaching of

the Gospel is so identical with the giving of testimony, so spontaneous and informal, that only an unstudied and *ex tempore* expression of the message is warranted or desirable.

Now preaching always must have in it this spontaneous and free character. This is necessary for both the preacher and the audience. But this does not exclude the most thoughtful and accurate preparation. It is possible to unite the two, although it is difficult. We know that it is possible to prepare for an event or action with such painful care that all genuine and spontaneous character is shredded out of it and success is made impossible simply on this account. But this need not be so. It is altogether possible to work diligently on a sermon, putting the utmost thought and time upon it and still have it vital, full of glow, warm from the heart and lip.

As a matter of fact the most careful preparation goes along with the greatest freedom. To know the ground over which one is to go is the surest way to secure freedom and certainty of movement. It is the one who is not ready who cannot advance with confidence. The idea that if the Christian messenger opens his mouth the Lord will fill it may be to deny the Holy Spirit rather than to honour His leadership. The Lord fills the mouth of no man who is too lazy to prepare by the use of every power of mind and heart and will. We

honour our message most when we sweat hardest to prepare for its delivery.

The result of the hard work involved in genuine preparation for preaching is the elevation and refinement of personality which comes as the result of trying to give the Gospel to others in a worthy way. Every person ought to grow nobler under the influence of doing good work; but this is true in an especial degree of preaching. One of the reasons for the high character of preachers is the fact that they are constantly handling such beautiful materials. Just as the dyer's hand is subdued to the medium with which he works, so the life of the preacher must take on the colour and fashion of the subjects with which he deals. One great reward that comes to the layman who preaches is this ceaseless influence upon him of the Gospel as a creative energy, moulding him constantly to the ideals which he sets forth in his messages. Character is something always in the making; it is a great gift when we may have at our disposal the mightiest and noblest energies of the spiritual life, shaping us to the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Personal Loss Through Failure to Preach

It is on account of the considerations above that we understand the full meaning of Paul when he

wrote, "*For woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel*" (1 Cor. 9: 16).

The source of the woe lay in what he himself would miss from his failure to enter the open door of privilege as the herald of the message. It was not the fearful expectation of a dire disaster to overwhelm him in some distant world that stirred his soul; he was aware that failure at this point meant missing supreme opportunity and power. It is as though the President of the United States offered the high post of ambassador to Great Britain to one who was equipped to serve his country in that position, and the man to whom this signal honour was given declined to accept it for no sufficient reason. Not only would the nation suffer; but the man himself would be robbed of what might have been to him the source of the highest attainments in personal character and official station that ever could come within his grasp. This is the true way in which to apprehend the call to preach the good news as it comes to the Christian layman to-day. It is for his own highest welfare to respond; it is his woe if he misses the privilege.

III

WHY LAYMEN SHOULD PREACH

The Layman's Credentials

BEFORE we proceed to study the work of the lay witness and worker to-day, we will look briefly at the credentials which are placed in his hands. The zeal with which one labours is always conditioned upon the confidence that he has in the worth of his task and in the reality of his commission to labour in the cause. There never has been a noble piece of work done in the world without a corresponding depth and firmness of conviction concerning the worker's responsibility for undertaking it and for carrying it through to a finish.

The Worth of the Work

Jesus has established this once and for all time. Certainly He gave Himself to the cause of human redemption and reconciliation with a faith and fortitude that knew no bounds. He sealed with His own blood His confidence in the truth that He came to the world to make known. The disciple who has once caught this vision must follow in the steps of his Master.

The reconciliation of God and man and of man to man is the supreme Cause that could possibly engage the thought, the love, and the loyal service of any person. There is nothing else that compares with it. It calls for more workers; it demands more inventive skill; it lays under tribute more resources, both human and divine; and the value of its results is greater and more lasting than any other program that we know. Compare it with the founding of any great benevolent institution; or estimate the meaning of the Kingdom of God in comparison with any plan ever devised for human betterment! There is no other endeavour that ever has come within the scope of human thinking so brilliant and worth living and dying for as the Christian Redemption of the world.

The Human Factor

We know that this great Cause is not going to succeed merely as a result of human effort. The labour and sacrifice that has been put into it from the beginning is rich and glorious; but it is not yet adequate. The aid that has come from God to the brave witnesses for Christ is one of the most fascinating stories in all history and literature; but this has not yet brought the desire of the Christian people to pass. This Cause is a partnership, in which God and man must work together. When we sense with fresh clearness and conviction the

validity of the plan of God and the last command of Jesus, new earnestness sweeps over us; we are ready to take up the unfinished work and do our best to accomplish it with all the dedicated powers at our command. We are not alone in the work. All who ever have loved and followed Jesus are with us in the effort that we make to bring others to Him.

The First Christians

The outstanding characteristic of the earliest disciples of the Master in their conduct after the resurrection was their united practical effort to lead others into the new life in Christ, which they had found to be so real and good by personal experience. There were no schools for technical training in the doing of this work. This does not prove that the disciples were not well prepared to assume what they construed as their highest duty and privilege. Their preparation had been received in the school of personal friendship with Christ and one another. There were as yet no ordained ministers; yet these men and women had received the highest form of consecration, dedication of spirit to the Christ and His Cause by personal fellowship with Him.

Both kinds of preparation and ordination are necessary; our emphasis upon the actual situation among the first Christians is not a disparagement

of the theological schools and the various customs of Christian ordination. We mean only to make clear the way in which close relations with Christ and a sense of personal loyalty to Him is the deeper need underlying all training and official dedication to-day. This is the first and major qualification of the lay preacher. We cannot walk with Jesus in physical companionship; but we can be nearer to Him through identity of motive and fusion of purpose than even Peter could. Indeed, Peter was farther away from Jesus at the moment when he denied Him, even although both were in close physical proximity, than you and I may be to Him at any moment when we are loyal to Him in unseen but actual union of will in purpose and deed. This is the way in which the Christian to-day enters into the temper of the first disciples of Jesus and gets his credentials for his work. The obligations resting upon the first believers in Jerusalem or Antioch were identical with those now imposed upon all Christians in Boston or Chicago, in a prairie village or a mining camp.

Witness Bearers in Christian History

We know that one of the mightiest forces in the development of the Christian life of the world has been the power of personal testimony, spreading the Gospel and confirming its claim. Nothing ever has been able successfully or permanently to with-

stand this commendation and confirmation of the Gospel by the testimony of the men and women who have experienced its power in their own daily lives. It has made bad men good and good men better from the beginning; it is doing this to-day; Christians must tell their comrades so.

One of the noblest groups of Christians is the old and robust Waldensian Church of Italy. It has endured the fires of persecution for centuries and has been able to withstand the most fearful cruelties. An inquisitor who was once seeking to root them out reported that it was impossible to destroy the hated sect, for as soon as one became a Waldensian disciple he immediately set out to win another to his faith; and so it was unconquerable through the force of personal evangelism.

That which has been true of the Waldensians is also confirmed by the history of the Christian Church during every period of its growth and power. Its extension and strength depend upon the testimony and the individual labour of witnessing disciples. John Wesley's mighty work in England and the Great Awakening in America confirm this judgment.

Every Christian to-day must keep up this unbroken line of witnesses. Customs may have changed often and will be altered still more; but the method by which the Gospel becomes the power of God in individual and social life is unaltered.

If this truth once fastens firmly upon our thought and purpose it will make us also witness bearers, each in his own place and according to the powers that God has given us.

The Modern Need

If it is true that the work of the Christian witnesses was essential to the Kingdom of God when Jesus Himself was a preacher in Galilee, it is especially vital now. The proof of this proposition is established by such facts as these:

There are not enough trained and ordained ministers on hand to do all the work that is necessary if the Gospel is to be given to the whole world. Even if all the organized churches were fully manned there would still be great need of lay workers who would volunteer to complete the task which the so-called official clergy cannot possibly perform. The whole extension program of the church in the community and of the churches throughout the world demands the service of many thousands of men and women to preach and labour outside the ranks of the ordained ministry.

The influence of the new voice is essential to the work of preaching. It is easy for the work of the Church to become stereotyped. The minister, like all other workers, may become "set in his ways." The tendency to run in ruts is universal. The speaking of the layman brings a new note into the

witnessing work of the Church. Even if he cannot prepare a sermon that will be as finished as the product of the trained clergyman, it may have a certain virility and freshness about it that will more than compensate for the lack of material or form.

Then there is a certain convincing power in the preaching of a layman which is often exceedingly effective. The ordained minister belongs to a clerical class; his work is professional; preaching is his "business." Now let a man or woman speak who is certainly doing the work as a part of his voluntary service due to Christ! At once a new situation arises. Results will often be achieved that the learning or reputation of the lay witness would not lead one to expect. It is the convincing power of consecrated service.

The Desire to Champion a Cause

Every earnest person who believes anything deeply desires to defend it. We are not contented to be a part of anything which is not living and growing; therefore we must do something to promote it. The very fact that the Gospel has laid hold on us and that we have found a new life in Christ, compels us to do our best to bring others into the same experience. It is impossible to imagine anyone who has entered into the true Christian experience and has no deep desire to tell the

story of what has transpired within him. The Christian religion becomes a sacred Cause. It must be defended and extended and established. We simply must go to the rescue of the truth which is in danger. The spirit of the crusader is the inevitable response of the Christian to the need of the world for the Gospel of Christ.

The Command of Christ is Still Valid

The final item in the credentials of the layman is his consciousness that the command of Christ given to His disciples is still valid. The Christian commission never has been revoked. All the obligation that lay upon the Christian disciples in the first century rests upon the followers of Jesus now, with the added weight of all the larger opportunities and equipment for the extension of the Gospel that have come with the development of the world in the meantime. In spite of the easy-going methods of the Christian program to-day, it is shot through with a terrible earnestness. Its failure would be the paramount tragedy of human history. Its success depends upon the work of every disciple. Jesus commands us to preach the Gospel; every follower of the Master is a soldier under orders. We have no choice; we must obey.

IV

THE PLACE AND POWER OF TESTIMONY

Argument and Testimony

THE work of the preaching by laymen is so largely concerned with giving testimony rather than with argument or pleading that it is necessary to consider briefly the place that this activity occupies in the work to be done. Therefore at this point we take up certain general principles to be observed in bearing one's Christian witness in a public way.

There is a clear difference between argument and testimony. When we argue we set forth reasons; we are seeking to prove our point by the power of clear statement and logical reasoning. In giving testimony we simply tell what we know. We are not trying to explain or prove, but set forth and affirm what we have experienced.

An example of this may be seen in the case of the man born blind, whom Jesus cured. See John 9: 1–34. The Pharisees were committed hopelessly to their theories. They wanted to explain everything. If anything new came into their world they subjected it to the acid test of the past; if ever it had happened before, then it was a legiti-

mate subject for logical discussion; if it had not, then the case might be called closed and that without argument. So they subjected the happy man to their twin test. He must justify the condition in which he found himself according to their standards of proof. They were prepared to demonstrate to him that Jesus was a sinner and a sinner could not possibly forgive sins and that therefore he was still stone blind. He might be seeing in a physical sense; but from the conclusions of pitiless logic he was still sightless. But the jubilant man solved the whole problem with one slash at their reasoning. "One thing I know," he said, "I was blind, but I can see." There we have the whole difference and duty in a nutshell; we are to tell what we know.

The Power of Testimony

Argument at best is weak; men are seldom convinced by the mere force of a proved proposition. Occasionally one may array his facts so that a decision is inevitable from the convincing power of the demonstration; but generally the largest factor in establishing any case is the first-hand evidence that can be brought forward and which gives the final clinching power to the argument. Some one has said that the greatest single force that brings immigrants to America is the personal testimony, sent back by those who are already here and who

tell their kinsmen and friends what they have themselves experienced. Send no letters home and no emigrants will be feeling the urge out of the old lands to the new world.

There is an excellent illustration in Acts 4:5–14. When Peter and John were brought into court they had a statement to make, and they expressed themselves clearly and confidently. But they had something more. The man who had been begging regularly at the Beautiful Gate of the temple was with them; and now he was walking. Everybody could see him; he was evidence of the first order. Indeed, they could not fail to see him; he occupied all the center of the stage. There was no use attempting to dispute him; he was so much flesh and blood argument planted solidly there defying all their logic. They might have bullied or laughed the disciples out of court; but they could not dismiss that old beggar man walking in front of them. He proved the case for Peter.

It is a great joy to use the facts of experience as we do our work as Christian witnesses telling the story of Christ. We may rely confidently upon the convincing force of that which we have to give, for genuine testimony is bound in the end to be convincing.

Honest Evidence

Under all circumstances evidence must be utterly

honest if it is to be convincing. The poorest witness in the world is the one who does not tell the truth. The moment one begins to colour his story with his own particular ideas about it he begins to lose his worth as a witness. He must tell what he has seen or heard or known.

In giving Christian testimony we are under especial danger of yielding to our feelings, of colouring what we say by our own ideas in order that it may mean or prove something which we desire. *It is easier to preach than it is to testify.* Preaching permits giving many judgments as to value and conclusion; testifying demands only that we shall tell our story, plainly and accurately.

Also there is the danger of reading into our experience explanations that others have given of theirs; thus we may come to the point where we report an experience as ours when it is really the interpretation of the experience of someone else. Especially is this true of what is usually called "conversion." These changes run deeply down into the motives behind our actions. We hear what others have said concerning radical forces which have worked upon them from the power of Christ. It is not difficult to convince ourselves and then to affirm that we have enjoyed a similar transformation, when we have not.

Therefore we must be careful. Do not use a single item in your Christian testimony unless you

are wholly sure that it actually has happened. Make every detail justify itself before you employ it in telling your story of the Christian life. We must be sure that we are not giving *too much* evidence. Under the influence of others who can report a moving tale of spiritual transformation we must not declare that we have done or felt what is not wholly true. In civil courts this is called perjury. We cannot escape the penalty of such a fault, even if the inaccurate evidence were given in a holy cause.

Clearing Up Obscurities by Witnessing

There is no means that will serve more surely and quickly to clear up our ideas concerning any religious truth or experience than simply to shape it as testimony and prepare to state it as a confident witness. This is why it is of primary importance to submit our religious ideas to the standards of accurate testimony. As soon as we start to give evidence in respect to anything that we have experienced we have to reduce it to the very minimum of fact and to put it into the clearest possible words and sentences. If we were to write a long discussion of the matter we might allow ourselves more room, feeling that any obscurity in one sentence might be explained in another. But when we are giving evidence we must have the most concise and simple statement of the minimum of essential facts.

So the giving of Christian testimony has a direct relation to the solution of religious problems and the clearing up of doubts. If we are uncertain about our faith or experience, the surest way to work out of the fog is to sit down and think carefully how we would tell what we do surely believe and have experienced to someone else for the purpose of convincing him through testimony. How sure are we about the facts of our religious life? Could we tell what we know? If we start to answer such questions as these we quickly discover that our convictions and experiences begin to define themselves with new distinctness. We not only gain in the clearness with which facts stand out, but new experiences group themselves around the old ones, and soon we have a report to give that will confirm the claim of Christ upon the allegiance of all mankind.

The Obligations of a Witness

These are defined in the form of the usual oath: to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. The witness does not explain; he does not interpret; he does not make a plea. All he does is to tell the most straightforward story in the most precise language that he can command concerning that which he actually knows. The lawyers will interpret the law; the judge will instruct the jury; the witness will give the evidence.

This is not so easy as it looks. We are inclined to explain and to defend and exhort instead of sticking to the facts and holding strictly to our testimony. Therefore when the lay preacher begins to use evidence from experience, these principles are exceedingly important. What has Christ really done in our experience? We know this. It is not necessary to obtrude ourselves in telling the whole truth on this point; but we are under obligation to use this evidence for the honour of our Master. Perhaps we can express our testimony best in words that others have used; so we must not be afraid of the old words. They must have vivid and actual meaning as we use them; that is the imperative matter. Unless they do, we would better find some words of our own. What Christ needs to-day is truth-telling witnesses.

Preparing to Testify

We mean, of course, the preparation of that evidential factor which we are to use in the sermon. Does not the best witness simply tell what he knows on the spur of the moment and with the words that spring from the occasion? Would not preparation impair the very quality and force in testimony?

Not at all. The true witness is one who has made the most careful mental preparation for what he is going to say, if he has not committed it to

writing. This is the way in which to prepare to give evidence in preaching. We must go over our experience; we must subject every item of it to the closest mental examination; we must be sure that all we are about to say is wholly true, meeting the laws of good evidence.

This does not mean that we stage a rehearsal of our sermon; yet the more we repeat and work over the part of the discourse that bears the personal note, the better it will be delivered and the more effective its influence will be.

"Big I"

The danger of thrusting the first personal pronoun forward in the part of the sermon where we give positive testimony is self-evident. Testimony must be personal; there is no escape from this fact. But we must not let our personality so obtrude itself that we stand out too prominently in the center of the scene. It is altogether possible that the witness for Christ will become so conspicuous that the Master Himself is obscured.

The way in which to meet this danger and to insure the modesty and effectiveness of the testimony is to ask ourselves often: Is this personal evidence making Christ more conspicuous than it is making me? If we are certain that we have thus related ourselves to the evidence that we are seeking to give, we may proceed with all confidence in the sin-

cerity of our purpose and the final result of our effort.

Sticking to the Main Point

This is so important that we refer to it again here even at the peril of repetition. In all efforts to introduce men to Christ through preaching we must beware of the peril of diversion from the one single point that we want to present. A favourite device with those who find that they are moving into a position where they will be compelled to accept a truth which they are reluctant to approve is to divert the argument or confuse the issue. We must learn to hold to the main point as Jesus did in His talk with the woman of Samaria. See John 4: 19–24. He had brought the woman squarely to face the moral demands of her past life. She did not want to meet this issue; so she tried to divert Him by saying, "Rabbi, I see that you are a teacher who can answer all kinds of questions. Now your people say that we ought to worship God down in Jerusalem; and ours say that over on that mountain is the only place; which is right?" It looked like an honest question; but, as a matter of fact, it was just a clever trick to dodge the issue. Jesus was too excellent a teacher to be caught. He held the discussion to the one point; in the end he impressed the truth on the mind of the woman.

We must see the main point so clearly that we

shall not be obscured or diverted in our own thinking about it. This means that we shall have gone over the matter so thoroughly that we have the evidence at our complete command. When it is clear as crystal in our own minds it will become clear to others.

We must train ourselves to see the lead of questions and suggestions that are intended, under a mask, to divert us. Never allow a captious or diverting discussion to throw you off the main line of your proposition.

Thus we must be relentless in insisting that the line of thought be brought back to the chief point and held there all the time. Sometimes we must raise questions in the sermon; but if we do so we must be sure that they are not primarily diverting or divisive. And we must not allow them to take much time from the main line of thought. In preaching we must proceed. All the time that is spent in going aside, however pleasant the paths may be, is lost to the main discussion. We are aiming to secure a verdict through testimony and positive statement; so we insist that we shall not be delayed too long. We want an immediate decision; all clever devices for appeal and delay must be avoided.

V

PRAYER AND PREACHING

IT has become common practice to speak of the habitual use of prayer as the "prayer life" of an individual or a group; and in this sense the term is employed here. It needs no words of explanation or defense to establish the proposition that the layman who prepares to preach must be one who believes in and forms the habit of prayer. His task is too sacred and his responsibility too great to permit him to go on with his work without the constant practice of prayer.

Belief in the Power of Prayer

This means that the Christian witness believes mightily in the reality and the power of prayer. He may not have an adequate theory to explain the position that he holds; but he never wavers in his firm assurance that through prayer divine resources do actually come into life and that prayer is what Sir Oliver Lodge once called it, "an engine of achievement."

There are many forces that work against such a faith and it may be worth while to look at them

briefly before we think of the positive basis on which confidence in the power of prayer rests.

The thoroughly scientific conception of the universe looks at first as if it left no room for prayer. The "reign of law" is a term that seems to make the Christian idea of prayer of no effect. And it may, until one thinks of the absurdity of a law without a law-maker and an executive. It is like the will of father and mother that finds expression in the laws of the family life. But at no time are the rules greater than the will of those who made them. Parents expect that the family life will go on according to their provision in the household order; but when they see that it is time to intervene, they never are restricted by the laws that they have made so that they cannot change or administer them at will. The orderly conduct of the universe is not forbidden by the Christian idea of prayer; it is only confirmed and strengthened.

Again, the fact that men pray and that there seems to be no answer to their prayers tends to weaken our confidence in the power of petition. During the Great War how many men and women prayed, on both sides of the terrible struggle! But there was no answer at the time. The war did not cease. Death did not pass by those for whom anguished parents prayed with ardent faith. And the tendency was to doubt and finally to question the whole matter of prayer as a part of the Chris-

tian life. The final verdict was on the side of prayer in almost every case; but the struggle to keep the faith was often long and hard.

In the end the better reason generally won and it is certain to-day that prayer is God's means of working in the world. Christians to-day are sure of this for many reasons; but one is so convincing that all others are less than this. *We believe in the reality and power of prayer because we see the place that it occupied in the life of Jesus.* That seems to me the invincible Christian argument for prayer. Jesus practiced it and it gave Him the power that He needed at every crisis of His life. Since this was true in His case we may be sure that the same law will hold in ours. This is not a theory; it was a fact when Jesus faced the supreme difficulties of life in Galilee; it will be true now when we bear the heavy burdens of our busy days in the midst of modern life. Jesus never tried to explain the power or joy of prayer; He never defended it; He simply practiced it. And positive results followed from the habit. Jesus was brave and happy and serene. He came from His hours of communion with God endowed with the energies that He needed for His work. The disciples knew that He had been with the Father and they understood the practical issue of those lofty hours. So we are sure of the reality and power of prayer because we know that under every circumstance it

actually worked with the one Man who practiced it most faithfully.

There are other reasons that are worth consideration. We shall hardly ever be disappointed if we seek for confirmation in our own experience, provided only that we take a long enough look at the facts. There may have been temporary setbacks in the flow of the tide, but on the whole it has been deep and strong. The life that is charged with the habit of prayer is finally victorious. We see this attested in the life of the men and women who have borne the heaviest burdens in the world's work; and we know that it is true in our own case, provided only that we study the grounds of the matter deeply enough.

Acquiring the Habit of Prayer

Added proof of the reality of our confidence in prayer is given by the way in which we can cultivate the habit of praying. There are no activities in our every-day life that are more sensitive to the laws of habit than is prayer. It is necessary to be regular and diligent in prayer as much as in the doing of household or office work.

The habit may be formed as readily as any other; and the danger of remitting it is equally great. If the question is asked, How shall one acquire the habit of prayer, the answer is simply,

Begin by beginning and keep going on. In the end this method brings one into the habit of prayer surely and happily. There are many helpful devices; but nothing is quite so effective as simply the steady doing of the act itself.

This calls for decision of character and the use of the will steadfastly. But there is no activity in the religious life that does not call for a similar determination; and the practice of prayer is only according and not contrary to the whole law of the Christian life.

It is against allurements away from the practice of prayer that we need to be most constantly on our guard. Perhaps the first argument to which we generally listen is that we are too busy to take the time that is involved in prayer. Every hour is so insistently demanded for some kind of concrete activity that we are reluctant to give the precious moments required for habitual prayer. The testimony of those who have tested the power of prayer is uniform on the point that no hour spent in its practice is lost, but rather used to the highest degree of effectiveness. Luther is the classic example of the man who was so busy that he found it necessary to take even whole hours for prayer; and when he was hardest pressed his time for prayer was longest and taken most conscientiously. Instead of the pressure of his duty being a reason for the neglect of prayer, Luther found it to be the

true warrant for time and energy spent with joy and profit in communion with the Father.

So the greatest Christians have been those who have practiced the habit of fellowship with God in prayer. Certainly men to-day are no more burdened with the tasks that call for time and strength than the men who have carried great responsibilities for Christ in the past have been. We may think that the modern pressure is heavier; but the resources at our command are correspondingly rich and useful. The net result is not to the disadvantage of the modern Christian worker.

Personal Intercession

One of the problems that arises in connection with prayer is the validity of personal intercession. Are we assured that it is right to ask God for specific gifts and to bear to Him the needs of our friends with the definite request that they be granted? Many have said that while prayer is to be practiced on account of its influence upon us, we are not to carry to God either the specific needs of others or to present our own personal requests in the way of intercession.

But it is to be noted that Jesus gave His approval to intercessory prayer and that He practiced it in His own religious life. Again, those who have done the greatest work in the world for Christ have been steadfast in their practice of in-

tercession and the request for personal gifts and blessings. We feel completely justified, therefore, in claiming for the practice of personal intercession all that Jesus justified in His direction to His disciples and in His own life. We believe that we are right in praying for definite gifts and that our Father means us to do this. Whatever the ideas of the fixed order of life and the reign of law may be, it is confirmed by the experience of those who carried on the practice that intercessory prayer actually "works."

The Use of Prayer Lists

This may seem to be a sudden descent from the ideals of prayer to the mechanics of its practice; but like all spiritual matters, there must be first the ideal and then the methods by which it is to be attained in action.

Now the list of subjects and persons for whom we are to pray is the best possible help in the holding of our wandering thoughts to the aim before us when we pray. It also insures the definiteness of the direction of our prayer. Every kind of fellowship calls for concrete acts through which it is to be realized. Even a lover has his "program." Therefore the preacher who means to practice the prayer life will use the definite prayer list. The names of those with whom he is working to lead them into the Christian life will be found there;

and he will bring these names regularly and confidently before God in prayer. And as his petition is answered he will cross off these names, which will stand for the confirmation of his faith as he sees what has actually been done in the past through the power of prayer.

VI

PREPARING TO PREACH

THE ordained minister has, in the great majority of cases, received especial preparation for his work; often he is a graduate of a college and theological seminary. The layman, on the other hand, may be a highly trained man in a learned profession; or he may be one with a slight amount of education. This situation calls for a brief study.

The Preparation of the Sermon is the Preparation of the Preacher

The matter of preparation may be considered either as the general equipment of the preacher for his work or the specific preparation of the sermon itself. Such a difference exists, without doubt; but it is less significant than would seem at first glance. In general it is true that the general preparation of the preacher to think clearly, feel deeply and act nobly is the best possible preparation for the sermon which he is to preach. There is no method by which water can be pumped from a dry well. The resources of the preacher are of

primary importance in the preparation of every sermon. Therefore in living richly every day a Christian preacher is making the best possible preparation to speak profitably at any kind of a meeting. He will exhaust himself in each earnest attempt he makes to express the Gospel. The sermon or address that does not call out in some way all the preacher's resources is not worthy of him. Therefore we are "preparing to preach" all the time. The better we do this the more quickly we shall be able to "prepare a sermon."

Danger of Disparaging Preparation

In the practice of lay preaching there always has been grave danger of neglecting adequate preparation. The warrant for this judgment seems to rest on the idea that the preacher is like the prophet in his reliance upon the inspiration of the moment. Also the words of Jesus are often quoted from Matthew 10: 19, 20:

"But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."

We would not undervalue the inspiration of God; it is the chief reliance of the preacher to-day, as it was of the Hebrew prophet in exile and the Christian witness in the first century. But to

press these assurances to the point where they warrant the least remittance of the most diligent, thorough preparation for the work of preaching is to violate the very spirit of the Bible. In the stress of an emergency the Christian may rely confidently upon help from God; but the obligation to prepare to the fullest extent for his duty rests upon every preacher with constant pressure.

The Danger of Over-estimating Preparation

If there is danger of disparaging thorough preparation in the interests of freedom to respond to the impulse of the Spirit, there is no less peril in laying such emphasis upon preparation that the joy and freedom of preaching are impaired. It is possible to work too hard, to be too anxious, to prepare too diligently. There must be room for the mind to receive new thoughts even while the preacher is speaking; the feelings must have room to act as the audience stimulates him; sometimes a change in the plan of the sermon must be made even while it is being delivered. If the preacher has prepared so thoroughly that he has forbidden himself such free action, he may have done himself and his hearers grave injustice. Every teacher knows that a pupil may "cram" too hard for examination; the athletic director must watch to see that no athlete over-trains; and so the wise preacher will not overdo his preparation. If he

has worn himself out with study so that he is fatigued when he begins to speak he has misused his preparation.

Somewhere the Golden Mean between careful preparation and response to the Holy Spirit is certain to lie; and the most successful preacher is the one who discovers this and moves confidently along the line of its guidance.

Self-directed Preparation

In the case of the layman it will be necessary in the majority of cases that he guide his own thinking and direct his preparation for public speaking. For this reason it is all the more imperative that workable plans be placed in his hands, not that he may invariably follow them, but that by this means he may discover the methods which are best adapted to his habits of mind and temperament. The speaker who has been guided through a long course of study may seem to have the advantage; but in the long run the layman and volunteer preacher who sees his need, searches widely for the best methods and uses them persistently, will make himself an effective and happy speaker. Instead of proving an insuperable handicap, the very fact that he must work hard on his problem will provide him with resources and power which he might otherwise never have gained.

Physical Fitness

The first basis of a successful lay sermon lies in the physical fitness of the preacher. Such a warrant for success exists in all phases of life. Even Christian character is influenced by the welfare of the body. Many a preacher works so hard on his sermon that he is physically exhausted at the time of its delivery; he may mortgage his success completely by the way in which he uses up his energies in preliminary study, especially if he worries in the process. It is often far better to take a brisk walk, fill the lungs with oxygen, draw the mind off the sermon theme, and in every way try to refresh and recruit one's physical energies before the sermon is delivered. To start the service or lead the meeting with exhausted physical powers is to fail at the outset. Keep the heart beating strongly and all the currents of the body moving normally in order that the sermon may have behind it the whole impact of the speaker's body and mind.

Mental Preparation

The demand for this is self-evident. No preacher, lay or ordained, has any right to offer a congregation anything less than the best results of his earnest and honest thinking. We have laid great stress upon the factor of testimony in lay preaching; but the evidence furnished by the witness must be clear and thoughtful. The best evi-

dence is that which has been put into the clearest and most compact form. The witness who simply gushes with that which springs into mind immediately may tell the truth and yet fail to win a favourable verdict. The Christian witness is under a supreme obligation to arrange, to state, to order the evidence so that it shall lead up to a real climax of clear and convincing utterance.

Emotional Preparation

Anyone who has attempted to speak in public knows how sensitive the speaker is to the mood and temper of the occasion. It is possible to mar the effect of an otherwise beautiful piece of music by a small number of violent discords. A sermon shares in the peculiar qualities of any other work of art. Irritating conditions at the beginning hamper the preacher, whose mood cannot be wholly exempt from the annoyance. It is not possible to rush into a meeting with no time to compose one's emotions and expect to secure the right mood for a sermon.

This is one of the warrants for the service that precedes the sermon. The Bible lesson, singing and prayer are all definitely designed to prepare the preacher and the people for the right emotional reactions. They are not "preliminaries"; they are essential to the order of worship as a whole; and they are designed to serve the highest ends of the

service and meeting, namely, to give the right temper for the expression and impression of the message in the sermon. We shall discuss this point at length in a later chapter.

The Ten Minutes Before Service

Many a meeting and sermon have been spoiled because the preacher was robbed of the ten minutes before the service began, which he needed to "tune up" to the right pitch. How can anyone be expected to turn from a mass of fussy and often irritating details to lead the people in worship and to deliver a real message with no time to adjust himself? If there has been an unfortunate complication regarding the meeting, if there is a discouraging element in the situation, it is generally brought to the preacher in that precious ten minutes before the service when he is trying to adapt his temper to the purpose of the hour. Help the preacher, all you noble army of ushers and officers and servants of the sanctuary! Do not rob him of the sacred minutes, the use of which may involve the success or failure of the meeting, so far as the preacher's control of it is concerned.

Spiritual Preparation

This is, of course, the supreme item in the general or specific preparation. To preach a sermon is far more than to conduct a debate, deliver an

oration, or express a religious truth in terms of monologue. It is the exercise of a spiritual privilege; and for this purpose the preacher must be spiritually fit. There are many ways in which this elevation of spirit can be achieved; one is to affirm silently and repeatedly to one's self the message in the sermon and the reality and power of the Gospel until the desired assurance and exhilaration are attained.

It is possible to reach the desired result even when the surrounding conditions are not auspicious, as in so many cases they will not be. To *assure one's self* is altogether necessary in order that others may be assured. Quick and positive silent prayer is another means by which the mood of spiritual confidence and elevation is often secured. An encouraging word from someone, the recurrence of a Bible promise to one's mind, a verse or stanza of a hymn, the sudden consciousness that in preaching one is in the line of a noble succession of work and workers,—all these are ways in which the right spiritual altitude for preaching may be attained. In the end, however, this is the gift of our consciousness of personal relation with Christ, living and intimate, in close contacts with the souls of those who love and serve Him. To make one's self sure of fellowship with Christ is to prepare and to be prepared for preaching.

VII

THE BIBLE AND PREACHING

The Book of Life

PROTESTANT Christianity has always exalted the Bible to a place of primary importance as the rule of faith and life. Many of the most serious divisions in the Christian world to-day grow out of conflicting views regarding the Bible. On the one hand the Bible is sometimes regarded simply as literature; on the other, it is exalted to the place of inerrant, infallible authority. Neither position is wholly true. The Bible is the Word of God and the Book of Life to the Christian. It came out of the experience of living men; it requires accurate knowledge of life for its interpretation; it is designed to guide and sustain the new life in Christ. Therefore the Bible is in a peculiar sense the book of the preacher.

The Bible and Christian Experience

The first principle which will enable a layman to use his Bible with joy and satisfaction in preaching is derived from the relation between the experience of living men and women and the record of it in

the Bible. The Old Testament grew out of the religious life of the Hebrew and Jewish people; the New Testament is the result of the definite Christian experience on the part of those who possessed the new life in and through Jesus Christ. The experience came first; it possessed creative energy; it changed the lives of individuals and of groups. The record of this change is in the histories, poems, meditations, letters, teachings of the Bible. The Bible is of paramount value to us today because it reveals this long, splendid record of God's dealing with man. We know the nature and purpose of our Father God because it has been revealed to many men in diversified ways, and we have in the Bible the record of this priceless experience.

This gives the layman his first working principle for Bible study. He does not regard the book as a talisman. He is sure of the inspiration of its writers because he senses it in their writings. His doctrine of the Bible is not something that he brings to the books before he begins to study them; it grows out of his study, and becomes clearer and more vital as his study proceeds. The Bible is its own best defense and reward. To lead people to the point where they will study and use the Bible for themselves is more important than to defend it by argument or to apologize for any particular doctrines concerning it.

The preacher, therefore, uses his Bible as a means of discovering and appreciating the religious life which created the Bible. He is not satisfied, for example, in understanding what Paul says in Philippians; he works back through this revealing letter until he sees the very heart of Paul, understands this wonderful experience that came to him in relation with the living Christ, sees it repeating itself among the Philippians, and so enters into the full meaning of the Christian life as he discovers it, not simply *in* the Bible, but *through* the Bible. Then he is prepared to use the Bible effectively in his work.

The Source of Texts

Perhaps the first thought that we have of the Bible in reference to the preacher is that it contains the texts which will inspire and guide him as he attempts to give his message in sermon form. The Bible is far more than a great armoury of texts; but it is an exhaustless treasury of these. Therefore, among the ways in which the layman who desires to preach studies his Bible is the method which keeps this desire for texts in the foreground. This does not mean that he will study the Bible *only* to find texts. He will be seeking all the while to reach the deepest meaning of the writer; but constantly his mind will be alert so that he may lay hold on texts and texts may also

lay hold on him. Hardly a period of Bible study will pass without yielding him a text, a suggestion, an illustration, or some bit of material which he will use later in a sermon. Cards, note-book, or loose sheets of paper will be near at hand and he will record what he has discovered so that it may be available for later use. This we have noted under Methods.

The joy of finding texts grows with cultivation of the habit. I remember the day when I was reading the beautiful poem containing the blessing of Jacob in Genesis forty-nine and came to verse twenty-two:

> *"Joseph is a fruitful bough,*
> *A fruitful bough by a fountain;*
> *His branches run over the wall."*

I read the translation in the margin and seemed to see in imagination this tree, with its widespread branches, yielding its fruit to the owner, who had the right to expect it, but also extending over the wall to offer its gift to the tired traveller outside. It was such a picture of the human life that God has enriched! The sermon on "The Opulent Life" had to be preached on the earliest possible Sunday.

There was another day when I discovered the marginal reading of Psalm 55: 22, and saw that

God's promise of help extended to the burdens which He gives us to bear, but not to those which we hunt up and load upon our own shoulders. All the other Bible references to "burdens" swung easily into line, and a sermon on "The Place for the Burden" was soon ready.

Hunt for texts! There is no greater pleasure in store for us than to become accurate prospectors and fortunate discoverers of the pure gold of Bible texts, hidden away where the careless eye does not see them at all. We discuss this more fully in Chapter X.

The Source of Sermon Material

The Bible can furnish much more than texts for sermons. It is a perfect mine for arguments, illustrations, characters, and quotations.

Reflect for a moment on the worth of the great personalities of the Bible as material for preaching! There is hardly a point in the application of the Gospel to modern life which cannot be clarified or enforced in some way by the character and experience of the men and women who throng the galleries of the Bible. Joseph is never irrelevant to the problems of American manhood. The woman of Samaria lives in every "Main Street." Jesus touches every point of life to-day as much as He did in Palestine.

The priceless treasure of the prophets lies open

before us for rewarding study. What majesty and beauty in Isaiah 40 and 53! What throbbing truth fit for human needs in Amos! What courage and tenacity of purpose in Jeremiah! We have just begun to understand the prophets. It is wonderful to see a preacher of to-day interpret these preachers of long ago as Rev. Harris E. Kirk has set forth the message of Isaiah in "The Consuming Fire."

Then we have the poetry of the Bible, exhaustless in the accuracy of its interpretation of spiritual life. The writer of the twenty-third Psalm lives in New York or Kansas City, in a Vermont hill town or on a Dakota prairie. The struggle in the mind and soul of Job still goes on.

The four gospels and Jesus! Who can ever exhaust the material for preaching which is found in these? We may imagine that we understand it all clearly and are able to state it fully; then we read the Sermon on the Mount again, or the chapters of the Central Teaching of Jesus in John 14–17; suddenly we discover that we have no more exhausted the meaning of the gospels than the fisherman's pail of water dipped up to wash down his deck has caused the sea to run dry.

So all preachers may come back again and again to the Bible as the source of material and find it richer and fuller after every draught that is made upon it.

Reading the Bible, Not Books About the Bible

It may be true, as is often claimed, that the Bible has almost lost its place in Christian homes, in the colleges which were founded by Christian benefactors, and even in the study and the devotional life of many preachers. If this is so, the way to a better day lies in more constant and devout reading of the Bible itself.

The first tendency of a layman who has heard alarming reports concerning the results of historical and critical study of the Scriptures, is to give up reading and studying the Bible itself in order that he may get the last word from archæology, study the text and history of a book, or read a new translation or condensation of the Biblical material. All these are worth while; but there is a real danger lurking in this practice. What we need is to keep up our reading and study of the Bible, book by book, and topic by topic, while we try to gain all the help possible from the commentators. We face the peril of not seeing the town because there are so many houses. Or, to use other words, we miss the forest because of the trees. Many a preacher allows himself to become so snarled up with confusing details that he loses the one thing needful, namely, the knowledge of the large message and teaching of the Bible as a whole. The bewildering chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel must not prevent the preacher from gaining

a burning conviction of the calamity of individual and national sin, the brooding tenderness as well as the severity of God, the inescapable obligation of moral obedience and a pure heart if men are to honour their Creator and Lord. These are the truths vital to the preacher. They are to be had from diligent, reverent Bible study.

Bible Marking and Memorizing

Years ago as a student in Dartmouth College I attended the first Student Conference at Northfield. Mr. Moody loaned me his Bible, which I took to my tent every afternoon where I transferred to my own pages the priceless markings and marginal notes from his. The custom has gone out of use now; but the Bible on my desk has many a page marked by underscoring of words, connection of related phrases, and marginal notes, which are of inestimable value to me. Every preacher must work out his own system; but he probably will mark his Bible in some way to his own profit.

Memorizing is still more important, however. A verse accurately fixed on the tablets of memory is far better than one marked on a printed page. For use in preaching and conversation no material is more useful than the memorized passages of the Bible that have laid hold on us in moments of enriched spiritual experience.

Using Spare Moments in Bible Study

The majority of Christian laymen are busy men. They cannot enjoy forenoons of unbroken study. They work under pressure. They must use to the highest advantage the spare moments that they are fortunate enough to find available. Bible study is one of the most profitable ways in which to employ an odd five minutes, which someone called, in the language of the shop, "a jitney of let-up." If a man has a New Testament, a few blank cards and a pencil he can often get a sermon out of that five minutes. For example, I had ten minutes in a hotel lobby recently waiting for an appointment. Moffatt's translation of the New Testament was in my pocket and I read John fifteen. When I reached verse two, I was caught by the twofold process of the vine-dresser: he cuts off the fruitless branch, but he cleans the fruitful one in order to make it more fruitful. Two points of a sermon on *Fruitful Living* appeared. I recalled the way in which I had recently seen a group of tree surgeons cleaning branches of destructive scale by spraying, which furnished an illustration on the second point. And so ten minutes, which might have been spent in idle revery, gave time for the definition of a sermon. Success in lay preaching depends to a large measure on utilizing spare minutes with the Bible.

VIII

METHODS IN PREACHING

Human and Divine Factors in Preaching

THERE always have been two distinct points of view in the matter of preaching: that which has laid supreme stress on the matter of divine help; the other, which has stressed the necessity of study and preparation. There is no conflict between these. In the long run the preacher who works hardest on his sermon and also trusts God most completely all the time is the one who succeeds most. To disparage one factor or to over-stress one is to fail. It is the perfect union of the two that always brings the largest return. So we affirm again that methods of work are necessary, while faith in God is equally requisite for the preacher's success. Let us never separate what God has joined together in His wisdom.

Learning by Doing

There is one way in which to become the master of workable methods in preaching; keep everlastingly at it and learn by doing.

The layman is always in danger of hearing a successful preacher describe how he works and feeling that now he has found out the one way in which to succeed. So he goes at the new plan faithfully and soon finds that it does not yield the results that he had been assured would follow. What is the trouble? It is simply this: no man can work a method that does not fit his own temperament and power. What brings quick results with one man will bring only confusion to another. Because one man has been able to perfect a scheme by which he gets results to his satisfaction is no warrant for the assurance that any other worker can succeed in the same way.

Therefore, take every suggestion that comes to you, if it seems reasonable, and then work it out to the best of your ability. If it brings you satisfactory results, keep on; if it does not, then drop it, with no sense that you have failed. The only way in which to discover what method you can use is to use all the methods possible and pick out the best ones, as you learn by doing.

This principle is valid in all kinds of Christian work. Mr. Moody was always asking men, "What are you doing with your Christian ideas?" He knew that the test of action is really the final one. He had experienced life too fully not to know that the test of validity lies finally in acting and in learning by acting.

To sum it all up in a sentence: *Work for the methods that work.*

Economizing Time

Throughout this study we are keeping in mind the peculiar demands upon the busy layman arising from the fact that he must carry on his accustomed work and prepare his sermons in spare moments. Therefore he must learn to economize his time. Every minute is precious. The secret of successful work lies in using fully every available opportunity for thinking and writing.

For example, what shall be done with the time consumed in travel to and from work? Perhaps the majority of our Christian laymen must spend some time each day in various forms of transportation. These valuable hours may be used in running through the newspaper, " joshing " with one's fellows; or they may be capitalized for thought and study. I know a man who has cut down the time he gives to the newspaper so that he probably knows little about the last scandal; instead, he always carries a pocket-size book with him, and so succeeds in doing a little profitable reading every day. Suppose you must put in forty minutes going and coming to do the day's work. Ten minutes is enough for the paper either night or morning; and ten seconds is too much for a large part

of it. You have a text in your mind. Suppose it is Psalm 85: 9:

"Surely his salvation is nigh unto them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land."

You immediately face the problem of concentration upon the meaning of this verse, the subject that grows out of it, and the proposition that may be shaped from it. Confusion is all around you; but you are the master of your own mind. You can shut whatever you like out of your thought; you can attend to what you will. This is a law of the mind which we ought often to repeat to ourselves in order that we may confidently act upon it. So you shut the noise and all that would distract you out of your mind; you begin to think, wherever you may be. What does "salvation" mean here? You recall that you heard someone say, "Anything may be said to be saved to the extent to which it is not wasted." Then salvation means preventing waste, using everything to the utmost advantage, realizing all that is possible in a person or a situation. So it is a positive matter, not negative. What is meant by "fearing" God? You remember how often this idea is found in the Old Testament. It includes reverence, love and obedience. It is not cringing basely before a tyrant; it is looking up to, honouring and doing the will of a strong, loving Father. It is a human experience which is realized in every true home. Carry the

thought over into religion and we know what it means. Now what is national "glory"? Certainly not the record of great military victories, the possession of vast wealth, or lordship over others by means of force of any kind. The glory of a nation is its happy homes, its brave and ambitious children, its honourable men and women, its schools and churches, its freedom and justice. As your mind broods eagerly on these factors in your text, arguments to sustain them and illustrations to clarify them troop into your mind. You can hold them in memory, note them on a card, or fix them for later use. Thus you have economized time that might have been wasted and you have a sermon well under way in spare moments. You will have to practice so that you can pick up the dropped threads of such thinking; but the habit can be acquired in time.

Methods in Thinking

The real test of education is the power that it gives to the student to use his mind swiftly and accurately. It does not consist in loading his memory with a vast mass of facts; it is rather the training of his skill in using his mind so that he becomes a clear and honest thinker. Many a man, judged by this test, is truly educated although he never has graduated at any institution of higher learning.

This ability to think clearly and courageously,

therefore, is a gift that may be acquired by every layman. One or two simple suggestions may be made:

Hold to the Subject

The curse of ineffective thinking is the tendency to run off on almost any track that proves interesting instead of keeping stubbornly to the main line. This is the principle that lay behind the familiar old counsel that is still excellent: *Stick to your text.* The way in which to convince a hearer is to hold him steadily to the developing line of thought until it is hammered in so plainly that he cannot avoid consenting to the proof.

Convince Yourself

This needs to be said more than once. No preacher ever will win a verdict for the cause in which he does not himself believe. If the truth seems obscure, if it lacks power to persuade an honest hearer, work and work until you are sure that you yourself would be obliged to admit the proof.

Relate Your Ideas

There always is danger of seeing a fact out of relation to the whole subject. No detail of the sermon should be allowed to get separated from the whole body of the discourse. Otherwise it will

finally be lost. Fit your ideas together and make them compose a whole statement.

Filing Material

Preachers are often the victims of promoters who assure them that the last word has finally been spoken in the matter of filing systems.

We tend to clip and file too much material. Generally a preacher will accumulate more clippings in the first three years than he will in the next ten of his work. The habit of cutting out any material which we think may be useful needs to be linked up with the habit of so disposing of the cutting that it will be available when it is needed.

We suggest two simple methods. The first is the use of the standard library card, three by five inches. Carry these in a small holder and make notes as you read. Put them under general subject heads. Also paste small clippings on these cards. File them in a box or drawer.

Then use a standard letter file for larger cuttings and sections of magazines as well as for pamphlets. Label the folders with the appropriate subjects. For this a filing cabinet of the usual size is needed. But the folders may be kept in a stout box. In any case do not let the material grow too large. Run through it occasionally and throw away what is not needed.

Preserving Texts and Subjects

Phillips Brooks was in the habit of using note-books in which he recorded texts, illustrations and material of all sorts that would be of use in preaching. In the biography by Prof. A. V. G. Allen ("Life of Phillips Brooks," three volumes), several pages of these are reprinted. They are worth studying. The objection to the note-books is that they were not flexible. For this purpose library cards, either three by five or four by six inches, are much more useful.

For example, in your Bible study you have found a text that claims your attention. Make a note of it. If a subject is suggested it is still better. Write this down before it escapes your mind. Preserve it. Perhaps you never will use it; but you want it where you can lay your hand on it when it is needed.

Methods of Memorizing

The layman must cultivate his memory, for he necessarily works somewhat by fits and starts, and he must make up for this disadvantage by using his mind surely and constantly in preserving thoughts, arguments and illustrations. There are many "Memory Systems" advertised; undoubtedly the majority of these possess some worth. If they are well grounded in the laws of psychology they will help a busy man to train his memory. Nothing,

however, will give anyone the desired control of his mind except daily and persistent hard work. That is, the way to learn to remember is to begin to remember and to keep on remembering. This involves the hardest kind of mental labour. Books may tell us what to do; systems may aid us somewhat; but power comes only from ceaseless practice and may be had in no other way. Therefore use any device that you can obtain to aid you in memory culture; but do not remit the daily grind of sheer mental toil as you commit your sermon plans, points and illustrations to memory. In the end you will work out your own method; but you never will have any method worth using unless you work hard for it.

Using the Imagination

The place and power of imagination in preaching is often overlooked. The Gospel itself was called by Horace Bushnell "a gift to the imagination." We require the use of this priceless gift if we are to see Jesus in His earthly life, to feel the power of His example, to understand the meaning of His wonderful words. Then we use the imagination as we prepare for the meeting at which we are to preach. Sometimes this involves us in a certain danger, especially if we allow ourselves to picture the difficulties too vividly. But this can be overcome. The result of the right use of the im-

agination is to present the congregation, the needs of different individuals in it, the worth of the truth to all these people, so clearly before our minds that we are kindled into keener activity as a result.

Practice the use of the imagination thus to bring vividly the occasion and the possibility of service into view. Make yourself think and plan with the situation thus defined. It will make the sermon more effective and add great joy to the work of preparation.

IX

WHAT IS A SERMON?

Do Not Fear the Word

WE are using the word "sermon" instead of "talk" or "address" to describe preaching by laymen because we think that it is better to use the term without apology than to try to soften it down by a substitute. It is altogether likely that if a minister should say to a layman, "I want you to preach at the Corner School next Sunday afternoon," the man would look startled and make his excuses more quickly than if the minister had said, "I wish you would give a ten-minute talk at the Corner School next Sunday." But as a matter of fact, according to the definition that we shall give, that talk is a real sermon; and we do not think that anything is gained by toning the action down by using small words for big acts. We are studying actual preaching by laymen; we are talking about "sermons," as genuine as those that were given by the Apostles. If anyone desires to make the service more agreeable or the work less fearsome by naming it otherwise, let him do so. In our minds

preaching by laymen is big business and we want the grand word for it.

A Standard Definition

Probably the most widely quoted definition of the sermon is that given by Prof. Austin Phelps in "Theory of Preaching," page twenty-eight.

A sermon is "an oral address to the popular mind, on religious truth contained in the Scriptures, and elaborately treated with a view to persuasion."

This definition indicates that a sermon is not a book or printed essay; it is not a scientific treatise; it is not an oration or address on a literary or patriotic subject. It is not prepared for any especial class of hearers, particularly those who may be highly educated or for members of any religious body or party. A sermon is designed for the people, for the average mind, for "folks." The subject is religious truth as distinct from historical or scientific facts; but it is concerned with that body of truth that is treated and contained in the Bible; this defines the range of the field which is appropriate to the sermon. Such truth is not considered superficially, but it is given such extensive and elaborate treatment as will insure its reception by the informed mind. Therefore thorough discussion, appealing presentation, and a verdict in its

favour are all involved in the preaching of the Gospel in the sermon.

This, in detail, is what is involved in the definition of Professor Phelps. This definition, however, in spite of the general satisfaction that it affords, should have certain other considerations attached to it.

A Factor in an Order of Common Worship

We are not quite satisfied with the definition by Professor Phelps, in that it omits the relation between the sermon and the act and order of public worship, with which it is always connected, and apart from which it cannot be fully understood. The sermon must be incorporated into some kind of an orderly service of common Christian worship. A public speaker could not stand up and give an oral address, conforming to the details of the definition just given, entirely unrelated to either the form or the spirit of Christian worship, and have his utterance accurately described as a sermon. It would be a lecture or an oration; but it could not be a sermon. The sermon demands for its effectiveness the acts of praise and prayer and Bible reading; it calls for the harmonious arrangement of these elements in an order that works to a climax.

Even the simplest Christian meeting demands a dignified and beautiful order of service, into which

the sermon, however simple it may be, should be set like a jewel. This is often neglected in the conception of the informal meeting, to the loss of both the sermon and the entire effect of the gathering. In preparing for the simplest meeting, where a few hymns, a Bible lesson, and a prayer are to be used, the relation of these to the sermon ought to be most carefully considered and every effort made to have every item consistent with the subject and temper of the sermon. A leader who leaves the selection of his hymns until the meeting has begun, who does not go over his Scripture lesson carefully, who trusts to the mood of the hour for the prayer, will find that his sermon has suffered a serious loss. On the other hand, the carefully planned and thoroughly prepared order of service will help the sermon at every point. If the sermon can be made to fit into a harmonious scheme of worship, carried out in a reverent and composed spirit, it will aid the service as well as be aided by it. To be concerned with the sermon apart from its essential relations to the order of worship is to miss the purpose and power of preaching.

A Useful Book on This Subject

The larger volumes on Public Worship are often too elaborate for the use of the lay preacher. It is a pleasure, however, to commend a little book

which has been prepared to meet this very need, "The Conduct of Brief Devotional Meetings," by Paul Micou, published by the Association Press, New York, 1917. The writer says:

"The leader of the meetings, concerning which this manual is written, is presumed to be a layman, and the meetings themselves are of a very restricted type. The small devotional meeting is the best place for experiments in methods of worship, for there people who are intimately associated with each other respond readily to a leader's taking them along unfamiliar paths. This manual strives to point the way to greater freedom, sincerity, colour, and warmth in such services, and those using it will find they can carry many of its principles into more formal public worship."

The writer is a member of a church whose ritual is beautiful and noble; he offers all kinds of practical suggestions, all dignified, as they would inevitably be, by the fundamental ideals of his own training and taste. We commend the small volume for use by those who are members of Christian bodies whose liturgy is less elaborate; no mistake will be made in taking Mr. Micou as a guide.

The Material of the Sermon

In studying the sermon as a whole we begin with the substance that composes it. In a word, it

contains in some degree the Christian Gospel. It cannot be a sermon and fail in this particular. Thus it differs from other forms of oral address, like a lecture, an oration, a monologue or a dramatic reading. At first glance, this might seem to limit the sermon to a rather narrow field. The Gospel, however, the more we consider it, becomes an exhaustless treasury of fact and experience from which to gather material. No subject is more inclusive than this, since it embraces the whole reconciliation between God and man and between man and man. Every phase of the Christian religion and every human relation that is touched by it may furnish material for a sermon. Instead of being limited, therefore, or impoverished in respect to the amount of material at his command, the Christian preacher is the most privileged of all thinkers, writers or public speakers. The further discussion of the material of the sermon we take up in Chapter XII.

The Form of the Sermon

In the course of Christian development the sermon has taken on a definite form in respect to its composition and delivery. It is distinct in many particulars from the essay or the oration. It is determined in respect to length by the time that can be given to the religious service whose order of

procedure is determined by the number of elements that may be recognized in it. In general, the sermon may not occupy more than forty minutes in delivery; less than twenty minutes is not adequate to the clear and convincing statement of a subject that is large and important enough for a sermon. It should be furnished with a text, that is, a passage of Scripture, which suggests or defines the subject or theme, which may also indicate the plan of development, and which is generally regarded as giving especial force and warrant to the truth unfolded in the discourse. The form most generally approved provides for a brief introduction, a division of the theme, with appropriate argument and illustration, such applications as the preacher desires to make, and, in the majority of cases, a well-defined conclusion, in which the sermon often reaches its climax. It is necessary that the thought shall be unfolded in logical order, one step or point growing out of that which has preceded, and preparing for that which is to follow. All sermons should be delivered in clear, energetic and beautiful English sentences, with the added grace of earnest, chaste oratory. These are fair tests and standards to be applied to all sermons, from those given in the informal mission hall to the formal and elaborate ritual service. The consideration of the literary style of the sermon is so important that we shall consider it in detail in Chapter XVI.

The Factor of Conviction

We have chosen this word to describe the mood or purpose of the preacher as more or less distinct from that of the orator, essayist, poet or popular entertainer. The sermon represents the deep convictions of the preacher or it cannot fairly be termed a sermon at all. Preachers are sometimes severely criticised because they shout, become dramatic, or seem exceedingly urgent. There are doubtless cases in which this urgency is hardly more than a manner that is assumed because it seems to have become a characteristic of the preacher; in this case it is dishonest. But even so it is the abuse of an essential factor in all true preaching, namely, the deep conviction of the preacher that the truth he is proclaiming is not only true but also utterly necessary to the highest welfare of the individual and of society. He is certain that if the community misses the truth in his message it has missed something essential to its supreme welfare; and he knows that the root idea in sin is just this, missing the mark. We preach what we know, what we believe through and through, what we are sure is vital, so vital that without it the world is poor and miserable. This factor of conviction makes the sermon urgent and drives it home with power. This conviction becomes testimony, the meaning of which in the

work of the layman as preacher we have stated fully in Chapter IV.

The Element of Passion

This word may not be well chosen as the proper term to designate that deep feeling, glow and flame, which mark the true sermon at its best. The preacher is deeply moved by his truth and he is determined that this truth shall in turn move others. He may not reason with the careful precision of the philosopher; he may not plead with the poise and deliberation of the advocate before the Supreme Court of the United States; but he will surely be kindled with a fire that breaks "up from the burning core below" as he preaches. In the dark hour when the sermon loses this factor it has ceased to be true to form. The preacher understands what a prophet meant when he wrote:

"And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain" (Jer. 20: 9).

This is the mighty mood in which the Christian preacher works; it is as true of the lay preacher as of the ordained clergyman. Indeed, the passion of the apostolic temper is seen quite as often in the layman as it is in the official clergy. The lay preacher feels the compulsion of God. The urge

of speaking the inmost convictions of his heart is upon him. He will not be happy unless he can tell what lies upon him with the burden of conviction. The flame burns. He is in line of unbroken succession with the preachers and missionaries who have not counted their lives dear unto themselves and he rejoices in doing his humble service to the utmost limit of his powers, whatever the price may be. All this may be felt in the true sermon, although perhaps it cannot be put into the precise terms of a definition.

X

FINDING TEXTS AND SUBJECTS

The Place of the Text in Preaching

EVER since the beginning of Christian preaching a passage of Scripture has uniformly been used to suggest the subject of the sermon, to add its warrant to the truth presented, and, in certain cases, to furnish also the line along which the development of the thought might most profitably move. The "text" is, according to its simplest meaning, that which is "woven into" the sermon, and therefore is essential to it, as the material out of which any fabric is woven follows a pattern.

While it is not absolutely necessary that every sermon should be provided with a text, certainly nearly every one should be, and especially those prepared and delivered by laymen. The preacher himself needs the confidence that is derived from the text; the congregation has the right to it; the habitual use of texts by every preacher will help to bring back to home and school and church a waning knowledge of the Bible.

We are not here defending the use of the "proof text." Because a certain word occurs in a passage

we cannot necessarily use it for infallible confirmation of a proposition involving that word. Bible passages must be used with discrimination. The mere quotation of Bible verses bearing on a subject is not final proof of a proposition. We must not abuse the Bible by trying to claim for it what it never claims for itself.

How Texts Are Found

Texts are found just as all great discoveries are made in a big and beautiful world. They are in the Bible, thousands of them; they lie there like the gold nuggets in the mountains, waiting for the miner to find them.

Chiefly, texts are found in the process of regular and earnest Bible study. If the preacher will read his Bible with his mind alert for profitable texts, he will find them simply tumbling out on his table and fairly bombarding him with the demand that he take them in, love and brood over them, until finally they grow into beautiful sermons. The cards on which he records suggestions will heap up and the fat note-books will bulge with heavy stores if the lay preacher will only work hard and faithfully enough at his Bible study.

It is astonishing how many texts are constantly flashing out with new brilliancy of meaning from literature. Rev. Frank W. Boreham of Melbourne, Australia, has published two volumes of

sermons or pulpit essays, "A Bunch of Everlastings" and "A Handful of Stars," in which he has drawn from an amazing range of literature instances of the use of texts. Biography and fiction, records of missionary experience and the dramatic episodes from the lives of conspicuous Christian leaders, all have been compelled to yield their treasures at the magic command of this versatile and widely-read preacher. All this shows how texts may be derived from one's general reading if only he is keen on the scent. And what joy in discovery!

Getting Hold of a Text and a Text Getting Hold of You

We wish to keep the two ideas together; they never ought to be separated. It is not enough to grip a text; the text must also grip you. It is not sufficient to do something with a text; the text must do something also with you. These two activities hunt in pairs; each one helps the other.

First, then, grip the text! It has wealth hiding in it for you if only you will dig it out. A text with creative power never yields its riches fully until the preacher works hard at it. The more work, the richer the return. This involves, first of all, understanding precisely what the writer meant when he wrote the text. We dare not lug meanings into the text that do not lie there; we must

be sure that we derive from it all the meaning that it possesses. We must understand the full meaning of the individual words. For example, take 2 Timothy 4: 6, "For I am already being offered," as the Authorized Version reads. What does it mean? The margin of the American Standard Version says, "I am being poured out as a drink-offering." The Bible dictionary says that this was always a part of a sacrifice, completing it. So what Paul means to say is that his death, which he is facing fearlessly, is only the crowning part of a life of sacrificial and victorious service for Christ, which began on that glad day when he met his Master on the Damascus road, and will conclude when it shall be God's will to end his earthly career.

Or take another example: In the Authorized Version Philippians 1: 27 is translated, "Let your conversation be such as becometh the gospel of Christ." The American Standard reads, "Only let your manner of life be worthy." The margin, however, gives us the literal meaning of the Greek verb in the words, "Behave as citizens worthily." In a moment we have the suggestion for a sermon and at least a partial outline. We are the *citizens* of a commonwealth of good will, created by the Gospel of Christ, the most real and beautiful of all the orders of life into which we could possibly enter. What does it mean to be a citizen of the

United States of America? It surely gives us certain rights and privileges; it also imposes certain obligations and duties. Are there similar *rights* and *duties* involved in being a member of the invisible commonwealth of good will, suggested in Philippians 3: 20, "For our commonwealth is in heaven"? Should we emphasize the rights before the duties? The answer to these questions gives us the two points and the order of a sermon that will be interesting and timely. It has come, as so many more may also be drawn, out of the study of words, using an English dictionary and consulting the marginal readings. The translations of the New Testament into modern English are also especially useful in this respect.

Another profitable way of handling the text is to analyze and parse it, according to the practice of a former day in the study of English grammar. The useful old "diagram" of the sentence will reveal its meaning in new light. What is the subject? the predicate? the adjective modifiers? the adverb modifiers? are the conjunctions clear? what relations are indicated by the prepositions? The answer to such simple questions as these will give us a good start for a sermon and will often reveal truth that we had not seen before. Take one of the simplest phrases used by Paul, "in Christ." The whole Christian doctrine is lodged in those two words. The layman who has entered fully

into the meaning of 2 Corinthians 5: 17 and the experience that lay behind it understands the heart of the Christian message and is master of a truth that can be preached with joy and freedom. It all lies in the little preposition.

But all the time you are working on the text the text is also working on you. It hands back a rich gift for every ten minutes that you spend with it.

First, a great text quickens your mind. Every time you look up a new word or gain a deeper hold on the meaning of a sentence you add something to your mental treasure. Take such a text as Psalm 27: 8:

"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek."

When we begin to think what it means we see in a moment that religion is not artificial or superficial; it comes from an instinctive response by the human spirit to the voice of God. The divine is first; the human is second; religion is inevitable. How has God spoken? How should the spirit answer? What is the character of a religion that is thus grounded and expressed? It is impossible to wrestle with questions and conclusions like these without expanding and enriching the mind. In fact, as mental challenge and stimulus there is no activity that compares with preaching. The more you gain the more you want. How shall one get joy and profit out of Bible study? By studying

the Bible, not in little choppy sections, peptonized and diluted; but by mastering a single Psalm, getting the whole message of a great prophet, and daring to go to the limits of the Sermon on the Mount. The harder you work the more you will want to work, and many a task that has taken large sections of time will seem profitless in comparison with the intellectual activity of real Bible study.

Then hard work on a text quickens and refines your emotions. Your sense of the beautiful is increased. Your joy is intensified. You feel more deeply and love more truly. How satisfactory it is to work at something which brings constantly with it a deeper experience of beauty, happiness and love! So many of our daily tasks leave us with only an added sense of burden and drudgery! Perhaps the making of sermons has this effect on a few preachers; but in general this is not the result. Certainly in my own experience it has been precisely the opposite. I love to preach; I would rather work on sermons than to do anything else I ever have done; to find a new text, state the theme for a sermon, prepare the first draft of the proposition, and then gather the material for the discussion of it elevates my whole being with pure pleasure. I know how poorly I do my work; but I simply love to do it. It is as much joy and satisfaction to me to prepare and deliver a sermon as it can be to an architect to design and build a

beautiful house or as it must have been to George Inness to paint a picture.

Take an example: In 2 Peter 1: 5 we find the command to "add" one excellence to another in the effort to realize the full meaning of Christian character. The American Standard Version replaces the word "add" by "supply." But the literal meaning of the verb thus translated is to "procure and supply all things necessary to fit out a chorus." So the thought is that of equipping, training and directing a chorus. And so the eight virtues that are named here present the Chorus of Christian Character. There is an octave of them; and they must be present, all in harmony and proportion, as the instruments are present in the orchestra that renders a symphony. So the sense of the beautiful is increased by this kind of work with the great texts of the Bible.

Hard work on texts also increases the preacher's moral power and helps him in the attainment of Christian character. All honest work has the same effect upon the worker; but it is especially the case when a man is engaged with the highest truth and noblest ideals. The supreme facts in the universe are put into the keeping of the Christian preacher to interpret to his community. He cannot possibly handle them week after week without having his whole nature refined and ennobled in the experience. Study the faces of the Christian men and

women of any community; then look through a Rogue's Gallery; you see there what the Christian religion does in human flesh. But this is only the outward expression; the inner experience is far more real. Great subjects move to noble living. God in Christ and Christ in us! Let that single sentence live and burn in mind, imagination and quickened will! A new creation must result from the experience. The text has done its work in our transformed life.

Shaping a Subject

The subject is that about which you are going to talk. It is sometimes called the Theme, although the subject is more general in statement. "Loyalty" would be a subject; "The Loyalty of Christian Service" would be a theme. However, this distinction is seldom preserved accurately and need not be especially regarded by you.

Here are six subjects taken from a volume of sermons by Phillips Brooks:

The Light of the World;
The New and Greater Miracle;
The Priority of God;
Identity and Variety;
The Seriousness of Life;
The Choice Young Man.

Here are six subjects taken from a similar volume by W. L. Watkinson:

The Blind Spot;
The Holy Triple Alliance;
Comparative Service;
Sanctification: Entire and Universal;
Things Undone;
White Already.

From these the general scope of typical sermon subjects may be seen. The subject ought to be plainly involved in the text. Sometimes it is the same as the text. There is no objection to taking it, in its phrasing, from the words of the text; but it is better not to make this a uniform practice. Pleasing variety will be secured by making the subject differ from the exact words of the text; and variety is always desirable in a text and subject. But it must be consistent with the *thought* if not identical with the *words* of the text. That is, the subject ought to restate the central thought of the text and not to contradict it.

The shaping of subjects from texts is one of the finest tests of the preacher's inventive skill. I have had a class give as many as half a dozen interesting and accurate subjects from the same text, and it was difficult to choose the most satisfactory. A preacher is seldom wholly content with the first subject that he chooses. In general this is a good rule: Keep your text but restate your subject as often as your growing thought makes a new expression of it desirable.

Concrete Examples

One of the interesting uses of printed sermons is to compare the way in which preachers use the same texts and subjects.

For example, one of the famous sermons by Horace Bushnell is entitled, *Unconscious Influence,* from the text: *"Then went in also that other disciple"* (John 20: 8).

But Charles Reynolds Brown also has a sermon entitled *Unconscious Influence,* from the text: *"So they brought the sick people into the streets that at least Peter's shadow might fall on them as he passed by"* (Acts 5: 15).[1]

Here are two texts, used by two great preachers, with the same subject derived from them. This shows the large freedom with which it is permissible to work. The fact that a text or subject has been used and printed does not forbid any preacher from using it as he desires, provided only that he is not copying the material in the sermon itself.

[1] "Sermons for the New Life," p. 186. "Yale Talks," p. 84.

XI

THE SERMON PROPOSITION

WE shall take up at this point an essential part of the sermon that is commonly overlooked or slighted, especially when the less formal discourses of the lay preacher are discussed. We are convinced, however, that the study of the Proposition is vital to the effective preparation and delivery of any sermon; therefore we are giving especial attention to it now.

Definition

It has been said that the proposition is the sermon condensed and the sermon is the proposition unfolded. Perhaps the best definition of the proposition is to regard it as the detailed statement of the subject as the preacher proposes to develop and apply it in the sermon. Therefore it may not go beyond the true range of the subject; it will expand the essential factors in the subject in their accurate proportion and relation.

The Necessity of the Proposition

In maintaining that every sermon must have a proposition, we wish to make a distinction clear:

we do not affirm that in the *delivery* of every sermon the proposition shall be stated; but we mean that for the *preparation* of the sermon a proposition is absolutely necessary. It is possible to make some sort of preparation and never formulate a proposition; but it is impossible to make the best preparation until a proposition has been stated, is thoroughly understood, and is kept clearly in mind at every step of the discussion. This we are prepared to maintain in spite of the fact that many a preacher does not put his proposition into form before he finally shapes his material. He misses one of the greatest helps that he could have if he neglects the proposition.

So we lay down this unvarying rule: a proposition must be fully stated, with few exceptions in written form, as the preliminary essential to the preparation of every sermon. It may or may not be stated in the delivery of the sermon; but it must be there, in the background of the lay preacher's mind. The audience will know it is there, also. Even if it is not spoken it will be felt. It is like the skeleton back of and under the outward form of a beautiful figure in painting or sculpture; we do not see it, but we are conscious of its existence.

The Value of a Proposition

This is seen in the familiar practice of debate. The question is always stated; the phrasing of the

question is one of the most important items in the preparation for a debate; one loose term may ruin the whole statement of one side or the other. The statement of the question is only one form of defining a proposition.

In determining the findings of any deliberative body great stress is laid upon the correct phrasing, discussion and final disposition of the motion before the house. The motion, however, is only another form of the proposition of the sermon. In many cases the preacher does not carry a motion because he had none before the assembly. He was just talking into the air.

It is in courts of justice, however, that we see the most constant and accurate use of the proposition. The lawyer must state his proposition with consummate clearness and force. He may not have put it definitely to the judge or the jury; but it has been the source of all that he has said in his plea.

Thus we see that the proposition defines and clears up the subject to the preacher himself. This is its first value. Then it gives him a start and it keeps him going on the right road. If he finds that he is wandering all he needs to do is to state the proposition to himself again, and he is back on the track.

The Example of Abraham Lincoln

The point we are making is so perfectly illus-

trated in the case of Lincoln that we quote his own words, as they are recorded in Ida M. Tarbell's "Life of Abraham Lincoln," Vol. I, p. 43:

"I never went to school more than six months in my life, but I can say this: that among my earliest recollections I remember how, when a mere child, I used to get irritated when anybody talked to me in a way I could not understand. I do not think I ever got angry at anything else in my life; but that always disturbed my temper, and has ever since. I can remember going to my little bedroom, after hearing the neighbours talk of an evening with my father, and spending no small part of the night walking up and down and trying to make out what was the exact meaning of some of their, to me, dark sayings.

"I could not sleep, although I tried to, when I had got on such a hunt for an idea until I had caught it; and when I thought I had got it, I was not satisfied until I had repeated it over and over; until I had put it in language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy I knew to comprehend. This was a kind of passion with me, and it has stuck by me; for I am never easy now, when I am handling a thought, till I have bounded it north and bounded it south, and bounded it east and bounded it west."

We beg every reader of this quotation to re-read and ponder it. No more weighty words could be spoken to the modern preacher, whether he be ordained or not. That restlessness in the presence of the statement that was not clear is the first emo-

tion that every preacher should feel. Then comes the struggle to make the statement plain. There must not be a loose word; there must not be a phrase too much; there must not be a clause too few. Then comes the repetition of the sentences until they are clear in mind and memory. Every preacher must be certain that he never will convince others of any truth of which he is not himself first and fully convinced.

The Power of Chief Justice Marshall

Professor Austin Phelps, the great teacher of the theory of preaching, said that the power of Chief Justice Marshall lay in three things: "First, he understood his own purpose; secondly, he so stated it as to make a jury understand it; thirdly, he so stated it as to make them feel that neither they nor he had any concern with anything else. For the time, the opposition was nowhere!"

Audiences sometimes complain that the sermon is obscure and the style is muddy; if this is a fact, the explanation lies in the muddy ideas and the muddled language of the preacher himself. He had not done with his subject that which Lincoln did with his perplexing matter in his little bedroom. He got a glimmer of what St. Paul meant in a great verse; but he did not walk the floor with it and bound it on all four sides and then state it and state it again until he felt sure that any or-

dinary boy would understand what the Great Apostle wanted him to say in his sermon. Sermons that have this spiny sort of structure behind them and are then made beautiful by clear English words win a verdict. The layman must not be satisfied with anything else.

Working on the Proposition

Sometimes the proposition will come in a flash of insight; but generally it must be worked out,—and it is often hard work, too! The four suggestions that follow have come out of practical experience with this factor of the sermon.

First, *study* it. What does the text mean; what does the subject mean; what is the proposition going to mean, in order that the sermon may mean something? That involves real hard work. Dig for the accurate meaning of the writer's idea to you to-day, as Lincoln tried to make the sentences of the grown men plain to a boy.

Then, *state* it. Do it more than once. The first time you may hit it, squarely in the bull's-eye. Then you are fortunate and may go ahead. More often you will not; it is not clear. Then state it again. Put it as many times and in as many different words as will finally leave it clear and convincing.

That is, *polish* it. You know how rough material demands time and strength in finishing it so

that it will be beautiful! And the sermon proposition ought to be beautiful. Put the best words that you can find into it; make the structure of the sentences the most clear and convincing that you know how to write.

And when you have done this, *write it out.* The preparation may have been mental up to the final point, although probably you will write the proposition more than once. In the end, however, write it out and read it over and commit it to memory. Then you have a proposition.

Examples From Great Preachers

It is not difficult to find examples of sermon propositions, for the older preachers used them in their published sermons as well as in the preparation of their material. One of the best examples of this practice is Horace Bushnell. A volume of his discourses entitled "Sermons for the New Life" has many formal propositions, of which the following is well known:

The title of the sermon is "Every Man's Life a Plan of God." This is almost a proposition in itself. But Bushnell worked it out from this suggestive text:

"I girded thee, though thou hast not known me" (Isa. 14: 5).

For this text and title he shaped the following proposition:

"That God has a definite plan for every human person, girding him, visibly or invisibly, for some exact thing which it will be the true significance and glory of his life to have accomplished."

Study this proposition and see if, in your judgment, it includes all that ought to be embraced in the discussion of the subject; if anything is included that might have been left out; if the statement is so clear and convincing that it will commend itself as the basis for a discussion.

We will cite one more. It is from a sermon by Rev. Theodore Parker on "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity." The text is *"Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away"* (Luke 21: 33).

The proposition is as follows:

"In actual Christianity,—that is, in that portion of Christianity which is preached and believed,—there seems to have been, ever since the time of its earthly Founder, two elements, the one transient, the other permanent. The one is the thought, the folly, and uncertain wisdom, the theological notions, the impiety of man; the other, the eternal truth of God."

Study this longer proposition in the same way in which you examined the one from Bushnell and note how they compare. Which preacher worked with the greater success?

Four Qualities of a Proposition

A satisfactory proposition has been described in many ways; but the following four qualities have been most generally recognized:

It should be *positive.* If it can be reduced to one simple declarative sentence, that seems the desirable form. In any event, exclamations and questions are not the proper form in which to state the proposition. It must affirm with positive confidence.

It should be *brief.* The intolerable quality is prolixity. Boil it down. Challenge every word so that not one gets in that could be left out. Of course it must be sufficiently comprehensive to embrace all that is essential; but generally that end can be secured within the compass of at least three or four sentences; and one is better.

It should be *clear.* If there is a dubious word in the proposition it has failed to achieve complete success. Especially watch your adjectives! Choose the right prepositions; they show relations, and these are of critical importance!

It should be *interesting.* The multiplication table is a series of propositions that qualify under all the conditions suggested above; but it is not interesting. If a human factor can be added to the proposition it will add interest. Above all, attain this end by making the proposition touch life at the largest possible number of points.

These look like simple conditions; but it is exceedingly difficult to fulfill them all. They are goals to be worked toward. In the end practice is the only road to perfection. The more we work on the problem the better the result will be. It is a fine test of accurate and vital thinking to draw up a sermon proposition; it is essential to effective preaching by clergymen and laymen alike.

XII

GATHERING SERMON MATERIAL

Form and Substance in the Sermon

TWO questions, we noted in Chapter IX, arise in respect to every sermon: First, What shall I say? and, second, How shall I say it? We shall keep this distinction in mind throughout this study. We have, therefore, to consider the material and the form of the sermon. Neither of these may be neglected in preparation for preaching. We must have something to say; we must say it in the best possible way. If one were forced to choose, he would prefer to have rich material in hand even if he used it poorly rather than to have correct form and nothing to say; but we must never allow ourselves to be brought to face this miserable dilemma. We must learn how to gather material and then how to present it in attractive and convincing form. As soon as the text has laid hold on the preacher and he has defined his subject and made the first draft of his proposition, he is ready to assemble his sermon stuff.

The Charged Mind

It is a well-known law of mental activity that we tend to discover swiftly and surely that which has commanded our interest or charged our minds. We invariably see what we are looking for. You know that in case you discover a new word you will almost invariably see it again within a few days. You always had seen it; but when your mind is charged with it you see it quickly. Anyone who is the victim of a physical malady soon discovers that nearly all the people he meets are afflicted with his trouble in some form. This same law operates constantly in the quest for material for a sermon on a subject to which we have given our attention in earnest. Once let the proposition charge the mind and all sorts of proofs, ideas, and illustrations come to us and group themselves around the interest that has possession of us at the time. They not only come into our minds, but they associate there in a certain definite order. There is a kind of unconscious logic of arrangement to which they submit. We sort them out without deliberately attempting to do so; and when we are ready to use them, we find them at hand, waiting to serve us.

This does not mean that we have no need to work hard on material; we must do something more than simply open the windows and let the thoughts fly in. Our mental powers never turn

out sermons automatically; they do act, however, with wonderful order and swiftness in acquiring and arranging material that is appropriate to a sermon proposition which has once commanded our alert interest.

The First Source: Our Own Thinking

We have already noted the importance of doing our own thinking on a sermon subject or proposition. This is our first duty from which we can under no circumstances be excused. What do we know about the subject? How does it present itself to our own reason? How would we set it forth in order to make it convincing to our own minds? We are not ready to consult any book until we have exhausted the resources that lie within our own knowledge. This principle is so clear that we take no time to discuss it longer at this point.

Our Observation of Life

As we reflect on the proposition, the next source of proof and illustration comes from our own experiences and the observation of the world in which we live. The most effective material for our use is drawn from what we have looked upon and known in the rough-and-tumble as we have studied our own motives and behaviour or observed and

reflected upon the experiences of others. Indeed, the richest and most useful sermon is the one that has thus come straight out of life, rather than from books or theories. This is why a layman's sermon often has a tang of reality about it that is lacking in the discourse of the technical scholar. We sense the note of reality in it; we know that it smells of life and the brown earth rather than of the study lamp. So the most successful preachers are the men who are also the most faithful pastors and personal friends of humanity. They " live in their house by the side of the road."

Henry Ward Beecher was a conspicuous example of this principle. He talked with all kinds of people; he knew the men at the Fulton Ferry quite as well as the scholars and social leaders of Brooklyn. His hearers discovered this in his large and human range of love and thought. The result of this close contact and observation of human activity gave his sermons an appeal that they would have lacked if he had been simply a scholar. The great subjects that Mr. Beecher discussed were interesting to the throngs in Plymouth church because they knew that the truth he unfolded in his sermons was close to their own busy, tempted, needy experience. In other words, the way in which to make a sermon *timely* is to knit it up closely with the *time* in which the preacher lives. It is a sorry day for any preacher when he lets his

sermon become remote from the life that he is himself living in the daily contacts of practical duty.

Using Biography

The most interesting fact in the world is a human life. Man is the one absorbing interest to man. Be sure that you read at least one great biography each winter. It may be necessary to read only a scrap at a time, for we are all busy; but it can be done with concentration and diligence. Take the book and stick to it. Ten minutes at night, used day after day, will bring rich material for preaching. In this way you become acquainted with a new friend annually. This extends the range of human relationships wonderfully.

We never can meet David Livingstone face to face; but Hughes' "Life of David Livingstone" is one of the quickening biographies that will furnish a preacher with abundance of incident, quotation and personal inspiration. Dwight L. Moody has ceased his physical life on earth; but the biography by William R. Moody is a fertile field of material for preaching which should not be neglected. Lord Charnwood's "Abraham Lincoln" is fascinating; Corinne Roosevelt Robinson's story of the life of Theodore Roosevelt is a rich resource for use in sermons. Two results are worth noting:

First, biographies bring us personal inspiration

and refreshment. It is a rest and relief to escape from our world of hard work and detailed labour into the high realm where these men and women have lived and laboured. There is quickening for our dull life from theirs; they are ready to give it to us. In a true sense they still speak, although we see them no longer in physical presence.

Second, we find all sorts of material for our sermons in the biographies of the missionaries and preachers who have met our problems and solved them, each in his own way. It is a delight to turn to the life of Hugh Price Hughes and to trace the progress of his ideals and achievements. We watch the growth of his mind. We are helped by the record of his attainments. We can present the claim of Christ upon men better as we see how Christ gloriously claimed him and made his life a benediction to his age and hence to all ages.

Using History

The story of mankind is one clear and unbroken proof of the reality and power of religion. Especially in the case of the civilized races, history confirms the truth of the Christian faith. The more widely a lay preacher can read in this broad field the better he will be able to give proof and example of the truth in his message. Whenever the Gospel has been honestly tried it has vindicated its truth and power. The history of the Christian peo-

ple is marred by many a human failing, which it would be folly to deny; but on the whole it is the noblest record of moral attainment, unselfish service and high ideals that ever has been made by active truth in any form. It is a pleasure to come to it for sermon material with the confidence that is warranted by the facts in the case. The confirmation of our message lies in the results that have flowed from it in the past as well as in its present victories.

Using Literature

To know the world's great books is a joy in itself; but it is also of immense profit to the preacher. It affords many arguments and examples for his work. By this we mean what has been called the "literature of power." Those books which have in them the quickening energy of noble thoughts and ideals are the only ones that have the right to demand our time in these crowded days.

The work of the poets comes first. Many men do not like to read poetry; perhaps it is a habit that must be cultivated diligently before it can command us; but it is worth all the time we give to it. The poets have been the greatest interpreters of the spiritual meaning of the universe and what they have seen is often the very vision that the layman needs to give his message point and power.

Therefore, occasionally take time to read one of the longer poems, such as Tennyson's "In Memoriam," Browning's "The Ring and the Book," or Milton's "Paradise Lost." Collections of poems are valuable; there is no better single volume, in spite of its age, than Palgrave's "Golden Treasury." The little collection that you make for yourself, however, will be the most useful. The newspapers print many of the old favourites; there are beautiful poems to be found in the current press; clip these out and put them in a file. They will give just the illustration that you may need for a sermon point. Among the longer contemporary poems John Masefield's "Everlasting Mercy" has valuable material in it for a sermon by a layman.

The next division of literature to become acquainted with is the drama. The value of dramatic literature lies in the portrayal of the motives and struggles of men and women, revealing the function of religion in human life and opening up new realms of experience to the preacher as he reads. This putting of the human problem in vivid form helps the preacher to adapt his message to real life. The Greek dramas are too much neglected; those who have not received college training often think that they are impossible "high brow stuff." As a matter of fact, such a drama as "Antigone" is easily read in a translation and is most sugges-

tive to a preacher. The plays of Ibsen and Galsworthy give manifold sidelights on the truth of the Christian religion.

The great romances are also fruitful. Take George Eliot's "Romola" as an example. The description of the struggle in the soul of Tito Melema; the sketch of the character and work of Savonarola; the study of the inevitable results of sin; these make the story a rich source of material for many a sermon. The tales of Hawthorne are charming in themselves and most helpful to the preacher. Out of the treasures of a well-stored mind come the facts that make the sermon convincing.

Watch the Newspapers

We all read the daily newspapers. They furnish the material which we may be sure is in the background of popular thinking. There is a vast amount of matter in them that is not worth the time spent either in printing or reading it; but the service of the papers to the religious life is immeasurable, and it is folly to disparage it. We must not overlook the daily press as a source of sermon material. First in point of importance is the editorial page and the more serious sections of the paper, such as the quotation of current opinion. It is astonishing to note how the editors have taken to preaching. There is many a first-class

sermon strayed out of the pulpit into the editorial columns of the daily papers. Then the news of the day often gives an item which will exactly illustrate a point which we expect to make in a sermon. Sometimes the humorous columns give a sentence that is worth quoting.

I carry a pocket-knife and a pair of blunt-point scissors with me; so when I run across any kind of material that fits my purpose I can clip it out easily and use it or destroy it as suits my purpose later. There is danger of cluttering up our files with such items; therefore if no occasion arises to use such material soon I throw it into the basket.

Study Cartoons

It is especially the day of the picture. Sometimes it seems hopeless to appeal to the mind in any other way. The "movies" command the crowds; the magazine that is not illustrated has a hard time appealing for popular favour; the cartoon seems to be more potent than the serious editorial.

Cartoons have tremendous religious power, however; they can be used by the preacher effectively if he will study them. The *Literary Digest* gives the best of the current cartoons each week. Clip and preserve them in a letter file. Occasionally take one to the meeting and use it. It may be too small to be seen at a great distance; but it can be

explained. It is one of the most vivid ways in which to give concrete expression to a truth. In general the cartoonists pick out the subjects that are best suited to attack by satire and in the majority of cases they are found on the right side of moral questions.

XIII

PLANNING THE SERMON

Terms Used

VARIOUS words are used to indicate the subject which we are to discuss briefly in this chapter.

It is sometimes called the *outline,* since it gives the general sketch of the unfolding of the truth. This is to be filled in as the preacher unfolds the meaning of his text and subject.

It is sometimes called the *plan.* This emphasizes the thought of the maker of anything, who has at least clearly in his mind what he means to construct. The Yankee practice of "just whittlin'" is not what is meant by proceeding with the actual building of a sermon. The whittler does not know what he will turn out; indeed, he does not intend to make anything and seldom does it even by accident. We must avoid the sort of sermon that is just whittling.

It is sometimes called the *development.* This means that there is a great truth involved in the text and subject, which it is the joy and duty of the preacher so to develop step by step that the

hearer will perceive and be profited by it. The thought of development leads us to the conception of the sermon as something *vital,* as it should be. That is, the truth in the sermon is so closely related to life that we do no violence to it when we describe it as *living* truth.

Still another word which also involves the organic idea is *organization* of the material. This is in many respects the most accurate of all the terms used, and is the one that we would employ if it were not so long. As it is we shall speak in the following sections of the *plan* of the sermon.

Necessity of Having a Plan

The sermon plan is to the preacher what the blue-print is to the builder or the mechanic. There is a great difference between a lumber yard and a building. In the yard we see the great piles of material. These need to be brought together into new relations in order that a house may be constructed. For this purpose the architect, the builder, and the plan are all absolutely necessary. Occasionally one hears a sermon that reminds him of the lumber yard; there is a vast amount of material in it; it is quite properly piled; but it is in no respect a house of truth in which the restless spirit of man may dwell. The sermon had too much material and too little order.

The plan makes for at least these four desirable

qualities in a sermon: precision, clearness, progress and climax. To each of these a few sentences ought to be given.

Every sermon needs precision of aim. The preacher must intend to hit something by means of his sermon. The proposition must have direction. It has been said that many sermons aim at nothing and succeed magnificently in hitting it.

Then comes clearness. Nothing can atone for its lack of this factor in the sermon. If hearers are left groping after the preacher's meaning they have the right to charge him with perversion of trust.

A sermon must move. The best illustration of a sermon is a river and not a pond. If water stands still it stagnates; if a sermon does not move it becomes a pool of death instead of a river of life.

Then a sermon must reach a climax somewhere. It may come in the conclusion, as it does in the majority of cases; but it simply must reach a height before it ends. The climax is the objective of the development.

A Flexible Plan

There is danger that the preacher will make his plan, writing it carefully, and then hold to it so tenaciously that instead of being his servant it becomes his master. There may well be more than

one plan. Make the first rough draft; then follow it, modifying it whenever a change is desirable. Or, put it this way: do not make a plan and then think it *out* or write it *out;* but make a first plan and then think or write *into* it. Under all circumstances make the plan so flexible that you can change it whenever it is desirable, even if you shift the order of the points after you have begun to speak.

We now consider a few typical sermon plans:

The Textual Plan

This is the one that is easiest to discover and follow. It is simply the order of the text transferred to the order of the sermon. In general it is probably true that the way in which any Bible author stated a truth is the best way in which to unfold or to restate it. So the textual plan has the weight of common sense in its favour.

The tendency of the layman is to use this method exclusively; therefore we express a word of caution on the matter. Vary the method of sermon planning. Do not outline more than half of your sermons by the textual method.

The majority of texts may be developed into sermons without change of the order of thought. Take the following:

"*Owe no man anything, save to love one an-*

other: for he that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13: 8).

An interesting title for this sermon might be, "Out of Debt and Always in Debt." Or it might be called, "The Supreme Obligation."

There are three sections in the textual plan that appear instantly:

First, the Christian obligation to pay one's debts. This suggests a large range of practical application.

Second, the supreme duty to live under the ceaseless compulsion of the law of love. This must extend even to one's enemies, as Jesus commanded. It is a debt that never can be fully paid.

Third, the fact that he who loves most perfectly keeps the law best. For example, the best way in which to keep the law of honest dealing is to love everyone with whom we deal; then we simply cannot and will not do them wrong. All the sins of impurity would be done away if love could reign supreme in human hearts.

This is an example of the way in which the text gives us instantly the sermon plan. It leaves no room for invention on our part, however; and we need the stimulation of finding other ways in which to express the truth in the sermon.

Plans for Discussion and Proof

Such a plan is sometimes called *topical* to dis-

tinguish it from the textual method just described. Instead of following the order of the thought as set forth in the text, the preacher devises his own order for the purpose of discussing or proving the proposition. Nearly every text may be treated in either way. It is often interesting to experiment with a plan of each sort and then see which better suits the purpose of the particular sermon.

For instance, in developing the theme of the text in Romans 13: 8 studied above, we might proceed as follows:

First, show the universal obligation of the law; the difficulty in keeping it; the intensification of the experience of sin arising out of human failure to obey; the need of finding some way in which to fulfill the law.

Then show how love is the fulfilling of the law. Illustrate this by the way in which Jesus rested all action in motive in the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore the way in which to conform to the law is to rid ourselves of all fear of transgressing it because we love.

Finally, show how love will lead to the most scrupulous honour in meeting all the relations of business and commerce. No one who is thus keeping the law by loving will cheat a comrade or assume obligations that he does not expect to meet fully.

The principle to guide a preacher in the use of

this method is simply that of full discussion and proof by the processes of logic. Does each point add something to the final proving of the proposition? Then it belongs in the development.

The Adverb Method

This name we have chosen to describe the way in which a sermon plan may be worked out by asking some of the following questions: *Why, what, how, when, what for, by what means* is the proposition true and applicable to the experience of men to-day? These and other questions, asked at the beginning and answered in the course of the sermon, afford a way of ordering the material which will often make it clear and also enable a hearer to fix it in mind without difficulty.

There is danger that this will become a stilted method if it is used very frequently; therefore we advise reserve in its employment. Also, the questions may be asked for the purpose of working out the plan, and need not be expressed specifically in the sermon as it is delivered. The preacher should be guided in this matter by his sense of fitness.

Take this text as an example:

"Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers; for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13: 1).

From this text one would preach on such a

theme as "Respect for Authority," or "Loyalty to Law." The proposition might be stated thus:

"All religion and stable government rests in the recognition of and respect for proper authority."

Begin by asking *why* this is so. Then proceed to ask *how* the truth appears in our common life. Then ask *what* the results would be if we should practice this in our religious, political and social relations. A final appeal for loyalty to the will of God and the laws of the land would give a fitting conclusion to such a sermon.

The very simplicity and ease of working such a plan of development makes it especially attractive. It also furnishes a strong temptation to use this method too often. Therefore guard against the misuse of it.

The Deductive Plan

We have chosen this description of a plan which may be easily wrought out. It was a favourite method of Phillips Brooks. It consists in giving a brief statement of the truth contained in the text and proposition and then applying the truth to various aspects of human conduct. It takes the truth for granted, as may so often be done in the case of the great texts. Assuming that there is general agreement that the principle is valid, we go on to study the effect that the application of the

truth would produce if it were worked out in daily life.

The danger here is that the phases of experience to which we make the application may not be generally accepted as subject to the operation of the principle. Therefore the preacher who uses this method must study carefully the applications that he makes in order to be wholly sure that he has not selected incidental or superficial areas of experience for his discussion.

Take this text: "*Thy gentleness hath made me great*" (2 Sam. 22: 36).

This is an age of rugged force and noisy action; but the mightiest forces are those that are gentle and loving. How would this modify life if it were applied in such areas of human experience as these:

In our neighbourhood. How would the quarrels and the jealousies of life be smoothed out if we were to realize the gentleness of God with one another?

In our political relations. Would partisan politics be softened and humanized if we could bring the love and tenderness of God into the activities of our ward and city, our state and nation and international behaviour?

In the Christian Life. How would the application of the unfailing courtesy of Jesus the Gentleman help us as members of the same church? How would it modify the manner of our bearing

toward those who are less fortunate than we are? How would it soften the hardships arising between Christian employers and employed? Is there any warrant for the familiar beatitude, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"?

Thus we have considered four ways in which sermon plans may be rapidly shaped. There are others that will appear as one practices on this most interesting detail of making the sermon. Find the method that suits you best; vary it enough to secure variety; and turn from the use of any one method when you discover that it is becoming habitual. You will enjoy the making of a sermon plan and be happy in your preaching as a result.

Memorizing the Plan

Unless the preacher uses notes, he will desire to commit his sermon plan to memory. The following suggestions may aid in this. If the plan follows the text, then the memorizing of the words of the text involves the plan. This is the easiest way in which to commit the outline to memory. In case the plan is not textual, it is desirable to reduce the points to single words of brief sentences and then memorize them. If they can be put into short and somewhat similar words this is an advantage. They may be recalled according to their similarity of sound; or by their logical relation; or according to such a simple scheme as past, pres-

ent and future tense. If sentences are used to represent the plan, the simpler and clearer these are the more satisfactory service they will render to the preacher. In any event, the plan should be committed to memory with such thoroughness that there will be no failure of the preacher to recall it quickly and surely.

XIV

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

The Importance of Illustrations in Sermons

WHILE the discussion of the proposition by means of solid reasons is the most important factor in a sermon, the illustrations by which the arguments are made clear and convincing occupy a large place in the material. In the case of preachers just beginning their work there is a tendency to use too many figures, anecdotes and long stories. In a recent sermon by a lay preacher there were three stories, given at length, each good in itself, but overdone. There was no real thought in the sermon. In the end this is ineffective preaching. On the other hand, the sermon that sets forth the truth plainly by means of proofs and pictures used in right proportions carries the consent and conviction of hearers as the merely argumentative discourse never would do. Therefore the laymen must study the use of sermon illustrations diligently.

What is an Illustration?

The reasons in a sermon have been compared to the solid walls that support it; the illustrations are

the windows that let in the light. This is the literal meaning of the word "illustrate"; and no better definition of a sermon illustration could be given. It is any figure or example that is used to clarify the proposition.

All truth is essentially one; therefore it is logically possible to explain the unfamiliar by a parallel from the familiar. Truth in the abstract is like truth in the concrete; therefore one may be used to illuminate the other. What is remote is essentially the same as what is near; therefore by a comparison we may make each more definite and commanding. It is necessary to understand this unity of the whole of life in order to justify the use of illustrations in the process of reasoning through a proposition.

The Weakness of Illustrations

The illustrations of the sermon may be the weakest point in it for this reason: no figure can "walk on all fours." That is, the moment an analogy is pressed to its details it will break down somewhere. This is seen in the case of the interpretation of moral and spiritual laws by their analogies in nature. The great example of this a generation ago was the volume by Prof. Henry Drummond entitled "Natural Law in the Spiritual World."

In this and many similar writings the effort is

made to clarify the activities of men in relation to God by the laws that govern the relations of the physical world. For example, it is said that God is light and therefore the divine influence is to be interpreted according to this analogy. This is true in general; but man can act in reference to the will of God as a seed in the ground or a growing plant cannot possibly act in respect to the influence of the sunlight. Here lies the weakness of all detailed and exact identification of so-called "natural" and "spiritual" laws. Man can resist, reject, act for himself; inanimate objects can do nothing of the sort. Therefore the analogy breaks down at a vital point.

This shows the essential weakness of the argument from stories or parables whenever the analogy is crowded to its detailed application. Within limits these stories and illustrations are true; but if they are forced to carry too heavy a burden of proof they are wrecked. They often contradict the very point that they were designed to confirm.

Hold to the Essential Point

This defines the first principle which must govern the preacher in the selection and use of illustrations. Choose the one essential point of likeness, by means of which we wish to explain or clarify the unfamiliar or unproved proposition; then hold

simply and steadily to that. Do not allow anything to divert attention from this point. Fight against the introduction of so many details that the sermon is cluttered up with them. Do not let the simple composition of the picture be ruined by bringing in irrelevant items.

Note how this principle is always worked out by the great painters. Fra Angelico is an example. He represents an event or tells a story by the use of a few figures. Interest is centered immediately and held steadily by the central element in the group. The light guides our eyes to this focus. The suggestion of all the lines carries us thither. Any detail that would draw our thought away from this single person or motive would be not only unnecessary but impertinent. We must attempt to handle every illustration in the same way. One clear, vivid central fact is to be brought out; everything else is to be held steadily in subjection to this one purpose.

Qualities of an Effective Introduction

We can suggest only a few.

The effective illustration will clarify by its essential meaning the very point which you are seeking to illuminate. That is, you must be sure just what you want to explain, and you must be certain that the single idea in the illustration explains it. Get those two items clearly in mind and you will

use illustrations effectively. This principle does not require further discussion here.

The effective illustration will be clear. If it requires explanation before it can be used to explain something else it is immediately disqualified from use. The hearer must apprehend and appreciate the central point at first glance without requiring explanations in advance. This accounts for the worth of the parables of Jesus. They were taken from common life: sparrows, flowers, yeast, salt, a humble woman losing a quarter, a farmer hiring harvesters, a boy gone to New York to make his fortune. Jesus understood with the insight of a perfect teacher how to explain truth by illustration so that no hearer could possibly miss His meaning.

The effective illustration will be interesting. If it is dull, too complex, remote from life, or in any way artificial it will fail to serve its purpose. Sometimes we take our example from such an unfamiliar field that it misses the audience. Quotations or references that would be understood in a university group are void of meaning in a shop. In general, the more human our illustrations the better they will serve their purpose. People are most interested in the events and problems that touch their daily life at the largest number of points. Illustrations drawn from fields that teem with human values are the most useful.

Discover Your Own Illustrations

Books of illustrations may be bought at almost any bookstore. They are often well chosen and as fresh and timely as could be expected under the circumstances. The fault with them is that they so seldom match the real point that the preacher is seeking to make; then, also, they are not his own. They are like ready-made clothing, which is said to be made to fit everybody and therefore succeeds in fitting nobody.

The most effective illustrations are those that we discover ourselves as we move through our world of work and play, living among our comrades with our eyes open and our hearts responsive to the human voices around us. The habit of picking up illustrations may be formed easily and its practice is a constant joy. All nature is an open book, offering us from every page its similes and examples. Biography and history, art and literature, the busy city, the quiet country, the open sky—all are waiting to give us material for our preaching.

Examples

In the following paragraphs we shall give examples of illustrations that we have picked up, generally when we had a sermon proposition vividly in mind. In doing so we recall what has been said in the section preceding: these examples are

given, not that they may be used by anyone to illustrate a sermon which he may have in course of preparation as he uses this particular section of the book, but simply to show by definite illustration what may be done in the ordinary round of a busy life to find appropriate illustrative material for sermons. We are not seeking here to supply more "canned illustrations"; but rather to justify the statements made in the preceding sections by concrete examples.

God's Plan in Our Lives

The new Federal Reserve Bank building was being erected in Chicago. They were at work on the foundations as we passed. High fences had been thrown around the deep excavations. Through the loose boards and small holes people were constantly peering. They could see nothing except a great confusion of materials. Engines were shrieking; men were shouting commands; it was all a bewildering mass. But in the construction room not far away were plans and blue-prints and specifications, by which all this scattered material and apparent confusion would finally be reduced to order. The men were not working aimlessly. Down deep in the excavations the plans were being executed. The spectators did not know it; the individual worker did not understand it

fully; but in due time the great structure would be complete according to the design of the architect and the plan of the builder. So there is another Architect and Builder who knows the plans of our lives; we must work with Him; in the end the work will be accomplished according to His wisdom and love.

The Value of a Man

We were watching the work of laying the foundations of a new railway terminal in Chicago. A windlass was working above a hole in which great concrete piers were being prepared to grip the solid rock far down under the sand and clay. A friend said, "I wonder what they will bring up?" Another answered, "Oh, just a bucket of mud." In a moment the question was answered; the windlass slowed up; out of the great muddy bucket stepped—a man! His clothing was stained to the colour of the clay in which he had worked. He had been down in the caisson.

So all the worthy work that ever is done in the world calls for the investment of human life. Nothing enduring is achieved until a man works at the task. The deep foundations of a better world will be laid only by the work of men's hands. We must stain ourselves with the contacts out of which come beauty and order. When God wanted to claim this world for Himself He sent a Man down

into it to lay hold on it. Thus the only true foundation is forever laid.

Tolerance and Conviction

In 1871, at the laying of the corner-stone of the Syrian Protestant College at Beirut, President Daniel Bliss said:

"This college is for all classes and conditions of men without regard to colour, nationality, race or religion. A man white, black or yellow; Christian, Jew, Mohammedan or heathen, may enter and enjoy all the advantages of this institution for three, four or eight years; and go out believing in one God, in many Gods, or in no God. But it will be impossible for anyone to continue with us long without knowing what we believe to be the truth and our reasons for that belief."

Here is one of the most finely balanced statements of tolerance and conviction that ever was given by human lips. It recognizes on the one hand the right of every person to his own judgment. Liberty of conscience does not guarantee identical opinions; it rather tends to insure difference of opinion. But that does not release one from the obligation to define and declare his own conception of truth. We have no right to insist that our belief shall be accepted by all who hear us; but we are under supreme obligation to let

our belief be known and to give the most cogent possible reason for it. Then we are truly broad-minded and honest preachers and teachers of truth.

From a Recent Sermon

One of the most effective preachers in England at the present time is Rev. G. A. Studdert Kennedy, who was a popular chaplain in the Great War and won fame for himself under the name "Woodbine Willie." In a recent volume of sermons, none of which has a text, and each of which is vivid and vital, he uses this illustration of modern life:

"You have watched hens in a run scratching for worms. One gets a whopper, a big fat fellow; another sees it, and you can see her saying, 'My best beak and Sunday feathers, look what she's got.' Off she goes in pursuit. There's a blood and fire fight, they lose half the worm, and get each a bit of the other half. If that fat-headed feathered fowl had had the sense to spend the time scratching poor old Mother Earth that she spent scratching her sister hen, she might have had six fat worms instead of a quarter of one, dusty and full of grit."

This is an illustration that has certain weaknesses and certain elements of great strength. It is perfectly clear to the English audience before which it was used; Americans do not use the word "run" as it is employed here; therefore the term

"hen-run philosophy of life," which is used in connection with the illustration, is obscure. But the figure is so clear; it is stated in such vivid terms; it suits so admirably the purpose of the preacher, that it commands almost unqualified approval as an example of effective illustration.

XV

THINKING, READING, WRITING, MEMORIZING

Thinking Comes First

WE have said this already so often that the repetition of the statement here may seem unwarranted; but we are eager to make the point so clear that there can be no least doubt in any mind concerning it. Nothing can take the place of earnest, fearless, original thinking in the preparation and delivery of a sermon. It must go on all the time, from start to finish. It is demanded of the lay preacher just as much as from the ordained and highly trained clergyman. The first question which one tends to ask when he has found a text and subject and defined a proposition is, *What shall I read?* This, however, is always a secondary matter; the first question always is, *What do I know and think about this subject?*

Until the demand of that question has been fully met and answered according to the measure of the preacher's ability, he is not ready to read. Of course, we come quickly to the end of our re-

sources, especially at the beginning of our work; but we have more material stored up in mind and memory than we think at first glance.

So we must ask ourselves, fearlessly and relentlessly, such questions as these: Why is this proposition true? What proofs of its truth do I see in my own experience and in that of others? What exceptions may fairly be made to it and what arguments can I furnish in rebuttal? What would be the results of applying this proposition in actual living? There are many other ways in which to challenge your mind to compel it to bring out all the ideas that are stored in it. In such ways we must exhaust the inner resources at our command before we turn to books at all.

Helps to the Habit of Hard Thinking

The first help to clear thinking is concentration upon the subject. The chief value of the proposition lies in the fact that it compels us to hold our thought steadily upon one central truth. Wandering thoughts are the enemy of all accurate thinking. We often hold attention steadily upon one line of thought for a short time; then we are charmed with another train and run off until we are soon lost. We must learn to hold our thought steadily to the one proposition and refuse to be diverted by the hundreds of appeals to our atten-

tion and interest that come to us from our surroundings and from our own minds. If we would concentrate fully we could easily double the output of our thought.

Our surroundings play a large part in the results of our thinking. It is possible to learn to concentrate upon a proposition even under most disturbing surroundings; but in general we think more clearly and rapidly when we are quiet and separated from confusing noises. It helps also to have the light right; to have the chair comfortable; to be free from all physical annoyance. We must not be too fussy about these externals; but they do count in securing the results that we desire.

Another help to clear thinking is the accurate statement of the main proposition and of each point as we define it. Do not let a step in the progress of the argument be uncertain. If the definition of a detail is hazy, try to clear it up before going on. Sometimes an obscurity will disappear as we proceed; therefore we must not stall too long on a single item; but clearness at every step is important and ought to be secured if possible.

Another aid to clear thinking is the challenge of every idea by the use that could be made of it in daily living.

Will it Work?

This is not the final test of truth; there are

higher and better standards; but this question will help us toward the choice and definition of the material which we intend to use in the sermon.

What to Read

Anything that will make the full meaning of text, subject and proposition clear and commanding may be read. This sends us to such commentaries as are available to make the meaning of the text clear. Use the Bible Dictionary for obscure words.

Then turn to anything at hand which will bear upon the proposition. Here your little card index to the results of your past reading will come into use. Suppose you are working a sermon on "Meeting Temptation," using James 1: 12 as a text:

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him."

The first draft of the proposition may be something like this: The coronation and joy of life come from successfully meeting its severest tests.

In developing this proposition there are certain words in the text which must be cleared up first. *Blessed* means *happy;* and here we have another beatitude to be added to those in Matthew 5: 3–10. *Temptation* means *test* or *trial.* *Approved* means

accepted or *passed examination.* Therefore here is an unusual conception of temptation; it means meeting and passing a test, such as is given to all the materials that are used in building a ship where nothing is tolerated except the best of everything. Therefore temptation is not an affliction imposed upon us; it is a privilege to which we are admitted.

Turning, now, to my card index, I find that there are five references to books and articles which I have summed up briefly, anticipating the way in which the summary would help my memory when I might want to use the material. Two of these seem to me worth considering. One is a quotation from Hillis, "A Man's Value to Society," p. 39: " Protection gives innocence, but practice gives virtue." This suggests the use of temptation, considered as test, in the creation of character. The other reference is to an article by G. Campbell Morgan, in which he showed that temptation has a direct bearing on the service that is to be rendered to Christ by the disciple, since the purpose of every test is to determine the fitness of that which is tested for a use to which it is to be put. Therefore our temptations are really the means by which we are prepared for the larger helpfulness that we can offer to Christ in the achievement of His Kingdom.

In following up the subject, I find that I need to illustrate it. The best illustration ought to come

from the life of a man who has successfully met the tests of the modern world and has proved his usefulness in the service of Christ. So I turn to the biography of Dr. Wilfred T. Grenfell, entitled "A Labrador Doctor," and run over the tests to which he had been put: the decision as to where he would spend his life and the choice of the Labrador; the fight with the liquor interests and his resolute determination to save the people from the curse of alcohol; his wonderful experience on the pan of ice, when he was in the greatest danger and yet felt no fear. From these and other incidents in the book it is possible to draw illustrations of the subject which will make it interesting and appealing.

Writing the Sermon

How much time shall a layman spend in writing his sermon? This question does not involve any conclusion as to whether or not he shall read his manuscript; nor does it touch the whole matter of preparation, which may or may not involve writing, and must be done with the utmost care whether a word is committed to writing or not.

Lay preachers write too little. It is drudgery. It is essential to complete success, however, unless one is such a genius that he is an exception to all the usual laws that govern preaching. It is immediately profitable for clear thinking and convincing

delivery. The external blemish of inaccurate and inelegant speech marks what might otherwise be effective lay preaching in many instances. The English language is a noble and effective instrument which often cuts those who use it blunderingly. We all need practice in elementary English composition more than we need instruction in theology; yet men are often restless in reference to the finished form in which their message is given, preferring to spend time in reading books which are often too deep for them to understand fully or too remote from life to be of actual use in preaching. Writing gives clearness and precision of style. Errors in grammar, which we do not detect when we are speaking freely under the glow of emotion, leer at us and fairly rebuke us from a written page. So write and write and then do more writing!

Occasionally write a whole sermon. Remember, we are speaking of the act of writing to follow the most diligent and thorough mental preparation. Perhaps at the beginning it would be best to write out every sermon; and this counsel is often given. We know the pressure of time and daily work upon the layman who makes preaching his avocation. It is probably too much to expect every sermon to be fully written. But we believe that for some time after beginning to preach every layman ought to write out at least every fourth sermon.

And by writing we mean not only the first draft, but also correction and rewriting when that is necessary. Make a complete job of it! To put the words on paper without careful reading afterward and then correction following is to miss the chief profit of the exercise.

Then write some part of every sermon. Of course the proposition will be reduced to writing, revised and rewritten more than once in many cases. But the introduction, the conclusion, a principal "point," a vital illustration, or a paragraph of especial importance in the message as a whole—one or more of these ought to be carefully written in every sermon. It is an excellent practice to write introductions for a time, until you have attained a fairly satisfactory degree of skill in preparing them; then turn to particular factors in the development of the thought; practice on conclusions; write similes or anecdotes. Work ceaselessly and doggedly in the effort to gain mastery in these details of sermon making.

An encouragement is found in the fact that the more one writes the greater facility and pleasure he will find in the practice. If it is irksome at the outset, we may be comforted by the assurance that it will become easier with repetition. This principle always works: we do best that which we like best, and we like best that which we do best. So the way to grow into liking to write is to write

faithfully; the better we do it the more we shall like it.

Memorizing the Sermon

Occasionally we find a man who is endowed with a quick and accurate memory and can easily use it in remembering the very words of his entire sermon. Such a person must be careful that his gift does not prove his undoing; for he may unconsciously repeat the work of others and become a plagiarist, which is a rather long and polite word for a clerical thief.

In general, however, it is better to memorize the outline rather than the larger written part of the sermon. In the case of the outline, it should be committed to memory with the greatest care. Be sure of it. Associate the points logically and in all other ways that will aid the mind in recalling them quickly and precisely. Then you are sure-footed at least so far as the order of the chief ideas is concerned. Your preparation will have given you confidence concerning the movement of the thought as a whole. In time you will doubtless be able to trust the moment itself for the larger part of the language with which you clothe the thought.

In general we believe that more rigorous use of the memory should be expected of a layman than he will naturally be inclined to exercise. Therefore his friends ought to help keep him up to care-

ful practice on his sermon plan and on those parts of the discourse which seem to call for especial clearness of statement. Here, as elsewhere, skill comes with experience. The joy of working grows with the faithful doing of the work.

XVI

SERMON STYLE

How We Say It

WE have noted the two factors that enter into a sermon, namely, What we say, and, How we say it. The former we have discussed under the head of the material of the sermon. We must now say a few words concerning the latter, or style in preaching.

This subject has received major emphasis in the more elaborate books on Homiletics and among the ranks of ordained priests and ministers. The classic volume in this field is by Prof. Austin Phelps, " English Style in Pulpit Discourse." Lay preaching is generally less studied and formal than the more elaborate and finished work of the ordained clergy; it must not be less beautiful and precise in form on that account. Indeed, the very informality of lay preaching opens the door to looseness of literary and oratorical expression which is full of danger and often results in the failure of a sermon by a layman on account of careless work in form. Someone has said that the spontaneous character of lay preaching makes the

study of expression as inappropriate as it would have been for the waiting father to have rehearsed the sentences by which he would greet the returning prodigal son. The comparison is clever but the conclusion is mischievous. It may be taken merely as a warrant for careless speech or preparation in the preacher's sermon; and this is never justifiable under any circumstances. Perhaps for our needs the best book to be consulted is any standard Rhetoric, of either High School or College grade. This does not quite meet the need, however; and we require a book on Sermon Composition, written for laymen who are willing to preach. In the following paragraphs we can offer only brief suggestions to guide us in practical work.

Cultivation of Style

By style we mean simply the manner in which thought is expressed in words, whether written or spoken. It is vital to the effect of the sermon and deserves far more space than can be given to it in the crowded pages of this small book.

The art of making clear, forceful and beautiful sentences by which to express the Christian Gospel is a gift and an attainment. In the first place, it is a gift. Many persons seem to be endowed by nature with the power to state truth in apt style; Lincoln and Spurgeon are conspicuous examples of this. There is nothing in their education or

training that can fully explain that wonderful clarity and force with which they were able to express their thoughts. God endowed them richly with talents which they used and cultivated in the highest degree.

Also, the command of English style in writing and speaking is an achievement. Dwight L. Moody is an example of the way in which a devoted and diligent man overcame the disadvantages arising from lack of education and by hard work, constant practice, and the help of his friends came at last to the point where he was master of a clear and rugged way of presenting truth. No lay preacher can allow himself to become careless on this point. The following suggestions are designed to help toward the achievement of English style in public speaking by the person who desires to preach and is willing to work.

Work on Words

First, study the use of the apt and precise word by which to express an idea. In general the short, Saxon words are the best. A young preacher once used this sentence, "Daniel Webster, in that solemn moment immediately preceding his dissolution," etc. What he meant, of course, was "just before he died." Eight words, five of which were long and heavy, might have been replaced by four, each of which was clear and forceful, to the mu-

tual profit of the preacher and his audience. We are not necessarily clear or energetic just because our words are ponderous and pompous.

If anyone sets about the task earnestly he can master on the average a new word each day. In his Bible study, reading and conversation he can discover either a word with which he has not been familiar, or one that is used in new relations, fix it in mind, generally in its fitting place in a complete sentence, and use it as soon as the proper occasion arises. Be sure that the word is clear to your own mind; then memorize it and fix it by enough repetition to make it permanent. In this way one's vocabulary is constantly enriched.

> "A new word each day
> Keeps dullness away."

In working for new words, avoid the technical terms on the one hand and slang on the other. In phrasing a sermon subject the preacher is often tempted to use such words as "solidarity," "integration," "incarnation," or similar Latin derivatives. A certain per cent. of these is always warranted; but do not load up with them. Shun the words that end in "*tion*." On the other hand, in the desire to be clear and "popular," we must not descend to the level of slang. We must follow the counsel if not the exact practice of the teacher who said concerning the use of slang and vernacular

expressions, "Brethren, cut it out." We must not be pedantic on the one hand or vulgar on the other.

Work on Figures

The force of the sermon is determined to a large extent by the wealth and beauty of the figures that are employed in setting forth the truth. Every preacher ought to keep his mind open to the sources of illustration that lie all about him.

There are new values always to be found in metaphors and similes. The metaphor describes one thing in terms of another, as, *He was a tower of strength.* No man ever is a tower; but he may be appropriately described in the terms of a tower. The simile uses an explicit word to denote the similarity, as, *"When she had passed it seemed like the ceasing of exquisite music."*

It is possible to make religious truth vivid and commanding when we can bring out its force in terms of something that is known. Take such a familiar statement as Psalm 144: 2:

"Blessed be Jehovah, my rock,
My loving kindness, and my fortress,
My high tower, and my deliverer;
My shield, and he in whom I take refuge."

These figures give a clearer idea of the nature and character of God than could possibly be conveyed by exact and detailed definitions. So when

Jesus told us to call God our Father in heaven, He clarified the thought of God far better than He could have done by attempting to give a definition of the Infinite—which involves a contradiction of terms anyhow and is patently impossible.

Then the simile may be used repeatedly to make truth plain and convincing. The words *like* and *as* are the significant factors in the simile. It makes the comparison explicit. Poetry is full of similes. Commit one to memory occasionally; others will group around these. In a recent poem the following vivid similes may be found:

The restless spirit of a young woman in a factory, who works all day and spends her nights in protest meetings and dancing, is "like a bird that all night long has beat about a light."

The soul of an old rabbi is

> "like a rock
> That bears a front worn smooth
> By the coarse friction of the sea,
> And, unperturbed, he keeps his bitter peace."

Here is a vivid picture of the tired mothers who

> "take home their babies,
> Waxen and delicately curled,
> Like little potted flowers closed under the stars."

Work on Sentences

A sentence is the expression of a complete

thought in words. It is a worthy subject for painstaking study and constant practice.

One tendency which the lay preacher must strive to overcome is the use of too many words. In a paper written by a student I once counted eighty-two words in a sentence which I was able finally to reduce to exactly eight words which expressed the essential thought completely. It was a matter of sheer repetition. Preachers sometimes seem to think that they are making progress if they are saying the same thing with different words and a little more solemnly. So work for the short, crisp sentence.

And yet do not fall into the habit of using the concise sentence so constantly that your style grows monotonous. I have before me a paragraph from a printed sermon by a famous preacher. It contains ninety-six words, which are placed in fifteen sentences, making six plus words to a sentence. Twelve of these sentences have a simple subject and predicate. This is carrying the concise style too far.

So the golden mean must be found between the laconic and the highly rhetorical form. There is one test which will generally determine the kind of sentences to be used, namely, Will the average hearer understand what we mean quickly and clearly, so that no physical or mental energy will be wasted in the mere labour of trying to find out

what the speaker was trying to say? If a sentence can pass muster at the bar of that question it is generally safe to use it.

Following the Best Models

We ought to try to read and to hear the writers and speakers who will furnish us the best examples of pure English style. We have suggested Lincoln and Spurgeon as models. There are many others. Two men in the American pulpit whose style is worthy of imitation are Rev. Charles E. Jefferson and Rev. Charles Reynolds Brown. Every layman should attempt to hear as often as possible such preachers. Then do not despair concerning yourself; make up your mind to do with such talents as God has given you the best you can, as they also have used their gifts. Let their achievement be a spur to you to meet your own task as it comes to you with all the resources that you can bring to the work. This will give you new courage and enrich you in your preaching.

XVII

BEFORE AN AUDIENCE

The Meeting and the Preacher's Task

IN this chapter we are obliged to crowd in without mercy a large number of sections that have to do with the delivery of the sermon as a part of the conduct of a religious meeting. This is a somewhat unusual way in which to approach and deal with the problem; but we believe that the logical way to understand the sermon is to consider it in reference to the order of service and the character and conduct of the gathering in which it is delivered. What kind of a meeting are we to conduct; how will this determine the character of the sermon and the method of its delivery? This is an essential question.

The Meeting and the Sermon

We have seen that the sermon must be considered in reference to the order of common worship in which it is involved. The people composing the audience, the purpose for which the meeting is held, even the time and place, all have a direct influence upon the material and the form of the ser-

mon. It was formerly the custom to treat the sermon primarily according to the laws of rhetoric and oratory. We are now coming to see that the psychological factors in preaching must be given the chief consideration. So we are now studying the laws that govern the activity of the preacher's mind; the conditions under which groups listen; the laws of mutual reaction of preacher and congregation. Our whole effort is to set the preacher as a thinker into a group of thinking comrades and to see how each may help the other most. Therefore the sermon in many essential details will be determined by the audience.

The Meeting and the Preacher's Preparation

Acting constantly upon the preacher's mind as he works on his sermon is the character of the congregation as he imagines it. He may not appreciate how fully this enters into his mental activities; but it will be constantly acting beneath the conscious processes of his thinking. For example, if he knows that the audience will be made up largely of those who are at least sympathetic toward the truth and ready to respond to its appeal, he will work with ease and assurance; he will arrange his proposition, select his material and deliver his message with zest and expectation of favourable results.

But now let the fact be present in his mind that

he may expect antagonism, that disturbing and discordant elements will be in the audience, that sarcasm and contempt may be the response to his appeal, and the preacher cannot avoid the sense of dread and hesitation. This will colour his preparation of the sermon and influence its delivery.

If the place is one in which it is difficult to speak; if the light and ventilation are bad; and if these conditions are known, they will make preparation the more difficult. We work with the meeting in mind; and all these conditions are ceaselessly acting upon us.

Managing Meetings

A whole chapter might be written on this single subject. If, as is generally the case, the preacher himself conducts the meeting, its pitch and temper are determined by his personality. Come reverently and confidently to the task. The preacher's bearing, the whole impression made by his manner, is essential to the successful conduct of a meeting.

It is necessary also to note the fact that the preacher is at the mercy of the group. If he conducts the meeting, the meeting conditions him at every point. The better word to use is *congregation* rather than *audience.* The latter implies a group gathered simply to listen; while a congregation suggests a common purpose for worship and instruction. The activities of a congregation are

mutually helpful or disturbing; the whole conduct of the meeting will be determined chiefly by the kind of people who are gathered and the motive that unites them. So the preacher is in the hands of the congregation.

We often speak of the way in which the speaker handles the meeting; it is quite as important to recognize how the meeting influences the preacher. This is why the character of the congregation to be addressed must be reckoned with in forming a correct estimate of the problem that a lay preacher faces on any occasion.

Of the two factors, the preacher and the congregation, undoubtedly the former is the more important; but both must be kept in mind as we try to work out the principles that are to guide us in preaching. The preacher's command of his order of worship is imperative.

Familiarity and Formality

The problem of keeping the right balance between freedom and formality in preaching and conducting meetings calls for brief study. The following suggestions are made in the interests of effective technique.

We must realize that both order and freedom are necessary in both service and sermon. It is impossible to guide a meeting and secure the desired results from the sermon unless there is suffi-

cient order and dignity to mark it as something different from the chance gathering of a group that is merely to drift through a random discussion. On the other hand, if the program becomes so prominent and the address so formal that the spontaneous and human values are obscured the meeting is a failure. To be spontaneous and formal at the same time looks like an impossibility; but it can be accomplished with skill and practice.

The secret lies in the personality of the preacher himself. *You* must be sure that you have combined in your own ideal for the sermon both the dignity of form and the play of thought and feeling which will redeem it from becoming dry and stiff. Charge yourself with human sympathy and friendliness; this is the first step.

Then, after the meeting, reflect upon the result of the service and see where you might have improved upon it or saved it from fault. While the impression is fresh and vivid in your thought prepare to do better next time by learning from the experience how to succeed.

Arresting and Holding Attention

The first specific problem in preparing and delivering a sermon is the arrest of attention and the transfer of it into permanent interest. Think for a moment how difficult a task it is! The minds of

the listeners have been given to all sorts of objects, varying from some flippant observation or an item of their own personal comfort to some noble ideal or profound truth. Now, in a moment, the preacher must sweep together all these interests and so command the minds of his hearers that they will think together with him on the subject of the sermon.

In the Art Institute of Chicago is a picture by Elihu Vedder entitled " The Fates Gathering in the Stars." With their vast nets the Fates are sweeping the heavens and drawing in the shining and far-separated stars. Their task is no greater than that of the preacher as he undertakes to sweep together the separated interests of his hearers and net them with his proposition.

There are many devices for the arrest of attention. These must be employed at more points than simply in the beginning of the sermon. Attention is likely to be scattered all along the way as the discussion proceeds. So the preacher must be fertile in resources to recover lost ground at any time. Perhaps the most common way to accomplish this purpose is to give a vivid illustration, make a definite reference to an incident or anecdote, shift the speaker's position, recur to the proposition in some form, or make a change in the tone. Nothing but practice will bring full command in this matter. Try all devices and then use those that work best.

You will probably find that each occasion will present a new problem and call for a new resource.

Late Arrivals

One of our chief perplexities is the late arrival of those whose interest we desire to command from the beginning of the meeting. There are many cases where lateness is unavoidable and therefore excusable; but also there are many persons who are utterly careless of their obligation to be prompt and who bring an element of confusion into a meeting which is always distracting and sometimes does positive harm. How shall a preacher handle this?

We must be prepared in our minds for it and cultivate as much tolerance and composure as possible. Occasionally preachers are unreasonably upset by the diversion of attention through late arrivals. It never should throw one into a panic; and if we yield to the annoyance too much we become our own worst enemies in the matter. So minimize it in your own thinking.

Open rebuke is seldom wise or warranted. We might do actual injustice in this way to someone who was not worthy of blame and would be seriously hurt by being "bawled out" in open meeting for the failure. It is difficult to imagine a situation that would warrant such treatment.

It is possible to train a congregation in habits of

promptness, in case the same preacher is with them for any length of time. Call attention to the time of the meeting and the value of prompt attendance in the announcements. Vary this, introduce novel methods of stating the matter, use both plea and humour in trying to impress the fact that prompt arrival at a meeting is a social virtue. If this is done kindly, firmly and repeatedly good results will follow. Many drops wear away the stone; be patient.

In certain cases of late arrival it is quite right to talk the subject over frankly in a personal interview. A stubborn offender ought to be told with no mincing of matters that he is unfair to others and damaging the interests of the cause which he is supposed to represent. It is not likely that harm will result from handling the problem in this way.

Pulpit Tricks

A fine judge of sermons said recently in commending a young minister, He is completely free from pulpit tricks. It was high and discriminating praise. It may seem incredible that preachers would ever stoop to the use of tricks in order to win popular favour. But the best of men are human; and it is quite possible for one to come gradually and without deliberate intention into the wretched habit of using clever devices to achieve his purpose with an audience. Therefore the

words "pulpit tricks" have exceedingly definite meaning.

Preachers discover that a certain way of speaking, a clever turn of tone or action, secures attention and wins favour. More often they discern this as they listen to a successful speaker. Then, without questioning the genuineness of the action in their case, they proceed to employ the same device. What may be a mannerism in one person may become a definite trick when another uses it for the purpose of winning approval from the congregation. Habits, when they are sanctioned by success, grow rapidly. Pulpit tricks, tones, gestures, manners, which begin with the desire to make the right impression, are easily stimulated, and before the danger is clearly seen have grown into practices that have no genuine meaning. A gesture that was designed to make a point emphatic and impressive succeeds; we use it more and more; soon it is a mannerism that is not justified. We raise our voice in order that we may make a sentence more vivid or commanding; it works; but under the influence of success we raise our tones higher and higher until we are shouting. We lower our tone in order that we may make a point more impressive by reason of the change; we succeed; the practice grows; before we are aware of the danger we have gotten into the habit of alternating shouts and whispers. Posture is another

point at which there is danger of pulpit tricks. The way a preacher stands has a definite relation to the effect of his message. But there are certain interesting and unconventional ways of leaning on a desk, striking attitudes and assuming dramatic postures, which find favour with large congregations. Famous preachers in the evangelistic field do this and have themselves photographed for publicity purposes in these positions. The preacher who is not famous enough to allow himself to become absurd attempts to imitate his successful comrade; the result is a whole crop of little posers.

The Holy Tone

Another of the artificial factors entering into our effort to give oral expression to the gospel message is the so-called holy tone. It is the substitution of a tone that is pitched too high or is filled with an assumed solemnity, when the level should be that of conversation and the accent as natural as that with which we would try to convey our thought to a friend in simple but serious talk.

It is exceedingly easy to fall into the pernicious habit of using the holy tone in public address because the conditions under which we speak in a public meeting are so unlike those which govern our common fellowship and speech in every-day life. We are on a platform; we are often "dressed up"; and we are taking a position of

leadership. All these facts enter into the state of our mind. We probably never stop to think about them or to state them; but there they are, all the while controlling our thinking and speaking. So we utter our sentences with a vocal pitch and an emotional enunciation which is entirely unlike the tone of conversation. We come at last to the pass where we "say such an obvious thing in such a solemn way."

It is one matter to realize the danger, however, and another to work practically to overcome it. But we have taken the first strong step when we have recognized the peril and detected ourselves in case we have fallen into it. Then we are ready to start to overcome it.

First, watch your tone! Generally we do not give much attention to *how* we are speaking because we are so intensely concerned with having something to say. But we must definitely and deliberately stop ourselves occasionally and ask the jolting question mentally, "How am I saying this?" Do this at a point in your address where you are going on pretty surely, so that you will not lose the line of your thought. Divert your attention to your own tone. Are you keyed up too high? The chances are that you have worked up from a natural pitch to one that is sharp and rasping. If you are sensitive to this, drop back at the first possible moment, come into the natural regis-

ter, shift your position on your feet or on the platform, and start over again.

Then note whether or not you are putting too much emotional intensity into sentences that are calling only for an earnest and yet reasonable expression. Sometimes a speaker will be saying something as clear and rational as the multiplication table in such tones as he would use if the house were on fire or he were telling the story of the rescue of a child from under the wheels of a train of cars. This spoils the whole effect of the address.

If it is possible for a speaker to receive the suggestion of a kindly critic on this matter it will perhaps help most of all. A discerning wife is a true helpmeet in aiding her husband meet the temptation to work off his holy tones on an audience. If the suggestion can be concrete and clear great help will be derived from it. Try to find out the *exact point* at which the mistakes were made, if the whole address was not marred by the fault. Then try resolutely the next time to correct the fault.

Perhaps we may be helped most if we insist upon the idea of preaching as dignified and sincere conversation on a religious subject. The best preacher is really the best talker. Not the flippant talker, of course; but the most genuine and natural talker is the one who in the end will preach with the least artificiality of manner and the best results.

Swallowing the Last Words of a Sentence

Perhaps this poorly describes what is meant by the especial fault in speaking which we wish to discuss now. It is the unhappy habit of many speakers to seek to make a sentence impressive at the very end of it by dropping the voice almost to a whisper at the last and so apparently "swallowing" the last words. This ruins the whole sentence. It is one of the most exasperating habits into which a layman can fall, and it is the vice of a large number of Doctors of Divinity as well.

The only way in which to overcome this fault, if one has fallen into it, is to try deliberately to carry clear enunciation and agreeable intonation to the very end of each sentence and fight the habit of whispering in solemn fashion the last words you speak before you come to the full end of the sentence. If you are making a statement, remember that the force of it will depend upon carrying each hearer with you to the very end. If you are asking a question, make the last words clearest of all and let the tone remain up where it belongs in an interrogation. If you are making an exclamation, remember that the end of it must be clear or it will all be lost.

Perhaps the simplest counsel is to say, Practice the Golden Rule. Did you ever sit listening to a speaker and find that often you had lost his last words because he had hopelessly whispered or

mouthed them? Very well; then make up your mind that you never will make anyone else suffer the annoyance to which you have been subjected.

This means that you will occasionally suddenly imagine for an instant that you are down in the seats and that someone else is on the platform in your place. Is he finishing up every sentence so that you can understand it without mental strain in listening? If he is, that is what you want to be doing, and you will now do it. And if he is not, you want to correct the fault, and that is what you will now proceed to do.

Nothing less than this swift mental check-up of yourself by yourself will help you to overcome the fault. With a little practice you can do this and not lose the thread of your discourse at all. No one can do it for you. You must simply *make* yourself do it.

"The Language of Zion"

One more item must be seriously considered, because we are in especial danger in respect to it. The vocabulary of religious experience tends to become stereotyped and therefore void of meaning to all those who have not been trained in it. The preacher understands this language; he uses it with clarity and confidence; but it is worthless as a medium of exchange among the rank and file of the people. Take such a term as "saved by

grace." It stands for a vital and precious experience to those who have passed through the great change described in the New Testament and in the language of Christian devotional literature; but to a modern congregation gathered at random it is not vital. It belongs in the technical language of a class and not in the living speech of humanity. It may be used occasionally; but it must not be one of the phrases which often recurs in our sermons. This does not mean that we are not to preach on salvation by grace; we are to preach on nothing else. But we are to find new words and other phrases by which we may express the truth which is obscured rather than revealed by the frequent use of the words "saved by grace." Make clear in your thinking the difference between a truth and the words in which it is expressed. Seek for new terms in which to express the old verities; and in this discovery you will find new values in the truth itself. Words must constantly be vitalized by thoughts; thoughts must be clarified by words. The specialized vocabulary of religion is not for popular preaching; the truth of the Christian religion is the only material for preaching of any kind.

XVIII

"CASTING THE NET"

The Fisherman

WHEN Jesus promised to make His disciples "fishers of men" He used a figure which they all understood to describe their work for the Kingdom of God. The task of the fisherman may be considered in many ways; but the one essential factor which may never be omitted is the taking of fish. There are many ways in which this purpose may be achieved; but by any and all legitimate devices it must be brought about. The fisherman does not sit on the shore dreaming about his haul; he fishes. One way of fishing is to cast the net. So this has been taken as the term to describe the securing of a decision to follow Christ as the one definite issue of preaching the Gospel by means of the sermon. Each separate occasion calls for its appropriate method. To all such methods we apply the figurative term "casting the net."

Thought, Feeling and Action

We are told that the sermon must arouse thought, quicken feeling and lead to action. No sermon is complete if it fails in any one of these respects. We must be clear on the relation between these activities.

The sermon must convince the mind. Right ideas are absolutely essential to true preaching. Religion cannot exist if it is fundamentally irrational. No greater mistake could be made than to infer that a man must close his mind in order to be religious or throttle his feelings in order to be scientific. This is to make a hopeless division in human nature. Our religion is reasonable and the sermon appeals to the mental powers.

Then the preacher must attempt to move the deepest emotions of his hearers. We act in response to our love and yearning and therefore the appeal of the sermon must be made to the feelings. There is danger in estimating the worth or influence of the sermon according to the emotional response that is given to it. If the people have been moved to tears by a pitiful story, the preacher is tempted to feel assured that he has preached with power. A balanced judgment is urgently necessary at this point. The sermon must appeal to the emotions; but it must base this appeal on valid reasons; and it must lead on to action in accord with the thought and feeling of the discourse.

It is not desirable to arrive at a new intellectual conviction or feel the force of a mastering emotion unless these thoughts and feelings are wedded to consistent and immediate action. Students of the mind tell us that it is a greater disadvantage to come into the possession of a new idea or emotion

and do nothing with them in practical action than it is to be unmoved at all. Thoughts and feelings must be expressed in action if they are to bless us. So the preacher seeks to inspire his hearers to make specific efforts to realize in service the truth which the sermon has brought to the mind and emotions.

Various Ways of Registering Resolution

There are as many appropriate ways of registering resolutions as there are methods of presenting the Gospel. It may be done in the silence and sacred isolation of the "quiet hour"; it may be part of a social movement, when we yield to the strong spell of a public meeting and do with others what we would not have done alone. The preacher must feel confident that any means is legitimate that gets the thought and feeling linked up with an action that expresses it. He must not insist on the use of any one method to the exclusion of others. The only danger is that action may not be taken. So we are not primarily concerned with the manner in which the decision is reached and expressed; we are anxious only that in some way it shall be brought about, with the full, clear determination of the one who makes it.

The Appeal for Private Decision

One of the most common ways in which to at-

tempt to secure a decision is to appeal for action to be taken privately by the hearer after he has thought the matter over. This method of casting the net is one easily used in many forms. It is simply the introduction of the plea for action into the sermon. Every preacher ought to study its use and practice it often. It will be the best way in the majority of cases to bring the truth home urgently to the mind, heart and will of the hearer. It does not intrude upon the sacredness or integrity of personality by subjecting one to pressure of any kind. It avoids the sway of individual choice by the action of the group, which often leads to decisions made in haste and repented of at leisure. It recognizes the fact that any momentous decision which is to be permanent ought to involve the most serious consideration, adequate time and the full consent of all the powers of personality.

Suppose that the sermon has been on "The Supreme Claim of Christ." The final paragraph of the conclusion might be like this:

"We have expressed as fully and clearly as we can the reasonable claim of Jesus upon our love and service. It is impossible to recognize this truth and remain unchanged in purpose and conduct. Are you giving Christ this first and supreme place in your life? Are you making the purposes which daily guided Him the motives of your own every-day action? Each one of us ought to do

this; each one can do this. Will you make this decision before you sleep to-night? Make it calmly and positively, putting behind it all the strength of your personality. Register it as the supreme purpose of your whole life. It will bring you joy and power; it will make you brave and useful. Christ claims you fully. Yield to that claim and live the abundant life."

The Use of Decision Cards

The custom of casting the net by the use of a printed card which is presented for signature is quite generally employed in meetings where definite decision for Christian service is sought. There are many points in its favour. The card may be varied in form so that it meets different situations; it allows time for reflection on the questions proposed; the very words are in sight, so that there is no uncertainty as to the matter to be decided; the card may be taken home, and thus time for consideration be given; it gives exact information which will be of use to the preacher and others in following up the case; a copy may be kept by the signer to remind him of his promise. If cards are used judiciously the danger of stampeding a person into hasty action is avoided.

It is probably best for the preacher to decide upon the form of card which he desires to use. After a few trials, he will know the exact phrasing which he can employ to the best advantage.

A card involving the simple decision for the Christian life may be prepared in the following form:

Accepting Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour, I desire henceforth to live the Christian life.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CHURCH PREFERENCE .....

Preachers sometimes desire to offer more than one item for decision on a card. There are many examples of such arrangements of details. The following is one:

MY PURPOSE

☐ I will begin to live my life in open allegiance to Jesus Christ.

☐ I will unite with a Church at my earliest convenience.

☐ I will renew my consecration to Christ and my loyalty to my Church.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CHURCH PREFERRED .....

In any case where cards are used, they must be followed up so that the signer receives personal attention at the earliest possible moment. Either the preacher, a minister or a Christian comrade must meet the person whose decision for a Christian purpose has been recorded. He must be established in such personal relationships and such activities must be found for him as will confirm the decision and help him in the development of his Christian experience. This matter we shall discuss more fully in the following chapter.

Action in the Meeting

In this section we consider briefly such methods of casting the net as holding up the hand, rising in one's seat, coming to the front of the room, giving an oral expression of purpose, or any of the numerous devices which have been found successful in bringing hearers to affirm their decision. Each of these has advantages. One may be useful on a certain occasion and not so successful on another. Adaptation is the law of success. But in some way a definite act of commitment ought to be arrived at if the net is to be cast. In concrete form the decision must be made positive and definite; if this can involve the witness of others it is the more commanding and permanent.

Many lay preachers shrink from giving the invitation to register a public decision to follow

Christ, fearing that they may do it badly and so cause more harm than good. Unfortunately the net has been badly cast in many a case; there is grave responsibility involved in the action; but if the preacher is utterly sincere in his invitation, if he will be sure that there is no cant in his words, if he uses the methods that seem best adapted to his purpose, he need not fear to make the appeal. It will be easier than it looks. Confidence will come with practice. It is like inviting a friend to the privilege of meeting one of the greatest persons in the world; it is not a hard task to do this. To invite anyone to become the friend and disciple of Jesus is not a difficult matter. It must be a joy and privilege.

The Personal Factor

It is not simply the method that determines the result of giving the invitation to begin the Christian life. The personality of the preacher is far more influential than any other single item. Therefore a few words are necessary on this point.

The method must be determined by your own taste and experience. Because a comrade has been able to use a device effectively you are not certain that it will work equally well in your hands. "One man's meat is another man's poison." Study your personal capacity and temper; try

various methods; then use what serves your purpose best.

Be utterly sure of your absolute conviction and earnestness in whatever you do. Is it not superfluous to say that the preacher must be certain of his sincerity and devotion? How could he preach at all if he were not? There are many forces that work on us to make us careless; this counsel is not without warrant. Good men grow professional. The least accent of uncertainty or hesitation is fatal. You must call for decisions because you feel that the truth is imperial and its claim imperative. Nothing can take the place of the preacher's own positive earnestness in this critical moment.

Be patient and undismayed! There will be times when you have preached with all the power at your command and given the invitation with pleading love. No response comes. The heavens are brass. What is the reason? You do not know. You fear that it may lie in yourself. This is a time when you need heartening. Take counsel of your courage and not of your fears. Enter into the meaning of the Master's patience. He struggled to make men like Thomas and Peter understand Him; apparently He failed with Judas. We all must pass through lonely hours, when we question our credentials because results are delayed. The only way in which to come out courageous and confident is to keep close to Christ.

An Illustration from Modern Business

As I was at work upon this particular section I was brought within hearing distance of the conversation of two commercial travellers. One of them was discussing the difficulties of salesmanship in the present condition of business and illustrated his point by describing a recent experience. He was seeking an order from a firm that was located in a place which involved considerable hardship in point of travel; in order to reach it without wasting time he was obliged to lose sleep, use an automobile and submit to considerable hardship in the matter of his meals. He waited an hour and a half to see the head of the firm; he did not get his order at the time; but he summed it all up by saying that he kept on smiling, was going again and would land his order in time. And as I listened to this story of adventure and good cheer from this knight of modern business it seemed that the preacher might learn much wisdom and take great courage from this experience. Would we do as much and as cheerfully accept a deferred success as this business man was ready to do for the order that he had in sight?

XIX

METHODS OF FOLLOW-UP

The Peril of the Incomplete

THE business world has invented and uses widely the term, "Follow-Up." It means the steady and, if necessary, long continued pursuit of a business "prospect" until it is fully realized in a completed transaction. Every business man recognizes the danger of loss because a proposition is only partially completed. This peril is still more serious in the matter of reaching a decision for the Christian life and perfecting it in the achievement of the Christian character. When the net has been cast and the decision recorded, the long and difficult process is only begun. The glow of emotion caused by the sermon and the meeting may fade quickly unless it is fanned and fed into steady flame. The real problem in Christian effort does not appear at the first hour of decision; it arises when the actual conditions of life are faced in the days of struggle which lie before the awakened soul. The preacher cannot be satisfied merely with his sermon and the decision of one whom the truth has touched. He

must do everything in his power to follow up the truth which he has preached and the person whom it has reached with fostering influences of every kind.

Christian Character an Achievement

This follow-up is necessary because of the nature of the Christian "salvation." It is not simply a magic art, a supernatural gift; it is also an achievement, a life under divine leadership. And therefore it is a partnership. Christ and the Christian coöperate. "I in them, and thou in me," said Jesus when He was praying to the heavenly Father for us. He recognized the struggle that was before His disciples; He wanted to secure for them the supreme help and comfort; so He comes into vital union with those who love and follow Him, making them happy and strong as they work to realize Christian character in daily life.

This thought of the Christian salvation as an achievement as well as a gift throws new light on the entire matter of preaching. It is something more than the act of a herald, by which he gives expression to a royal proclamation and then passes on. The preacher is a herald, indeed; but his message is to be realized in the development and achievement of individual character in social relations. Therefore he is responsible for more than the mere giving of his message. He must follow

and follow, counsel and encourage the one who has heard and heeded his words. The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is not attained in an instant by miracle; we must "watch and fight and pray" for the great result.

Love and Instruction in the Struggle

We must follow our message by sympathy and counsel so far as it is possible to extend these to others. The first requirement is love. Everyone fights a hard battle in the struggle for Christian character and therefore needs sympathetic appreciation all the time in every stage of his progress. A large factor in preaching is keen and constant sympathy with others in their effort to realize Christian salvation. How often a preacher scolds and censures when he ought to appreciate and sympathize! We criticize a man for his failure and fall; how seldom we know what or for how long he resisted! We all are weak and foolish; but words of sympathy help us when words of condemnation only drive us to despair. The preacher who understands this principle and applies it faithfully in his work will do more than present his message; he will follow it up in the spirit of appreciation and approval of every honest struggle of a Christian comrade even if it is not wholly successful. He will counsel again and again; he will encourage time after time. He never

will give up. He will believe in his man even when the man has ceased to believe in himself. He will be as tenacious of his confidence in a comrade's final victory as Jesus was in dealing with the disciples.

Personal Contacts

The first principle to be applied is that of personal friendship. The true preacher never allows his work to become "professional." He does not organize the big meeting, preach the great sermon, and then move on to other campaigns. He tries to follow up his sermon by continued personal contact so far as that is possible. Five minutes spent in earnest, face-to-face talk with anyone generally is worth more than a sermon, a letter, a tract, or any other "long distance" contact.

Of course this is not always possible. There are inevitable limits in point of time, strength and occasion. But the effective preacher generally has a keen sense of the personal values in his work, and he seeks every possible occasion to follow up by face-to-face interviews those whom he has been able in any way to reach with his message.

The individual prayer-list becomes a daily invitation to seek an interview or write a letter to the one whose name and problem are remembered before God in earnest intercession. One cannot pray for the Christian growth of a friend without doing

everything in his power to promote that growth by personal counsel and help.

The conduct of an interview, keeping the Christian purpose dominant, is a fine art. It must be human and friendly and natural. The value of it may be ruined by making it too somber. On the other hand, it must be earnest and direct, and must never lose sight of its essential purpose, namely, to promote the Christian experience of the one with whom we talk. We cannot enlarge upon these principles here; but we ought to study and practice the art of Christian conversation in order that we may follow up our preaching in the most profitable way.

Writing Letters

In these busy days the practice of writing letters of Christian counsel and encouragement is sadly neglected. It is one of the most profitable means at hand by which the preacher can follow up his sermons and supplement whatever time he has for personal interview.

The most successful ministers have been masters at appropriate letter writing. As a conspicuous example we note briefly the method of Rev. Maltbie D. Babcock, which is illustrated by Rev. John Timothy Stone in his little book entitled "Footsteps in a Parish," a volume that every layman may well afford to study. Dr. Babcock was a mas-

ter at letter writing. He kept a record of the deaths in his parish and on the anniversary was sure to write a brief note of remembrance and sympathy.

"The afternoon's calling was invariably followed by numerous notes in the evening. The day's work was done day by day, hence the inertia and discouragement of accumulated details was overcome. Frequently a note simply contained a line or two with a bit of poem or quotation enclosed which touched the individual case; sometimes merely a marginal word, or initials written upon the edge of a card. It was the personal touch all the way along, day by day, week by week, year in and year out."

Suggested Reading

The circulation of religious tracts still continues, but it is not so popular and probably less efficient than it used to be. However, the follow-up of the sermon must not omit the factor of directed reading as an element in the achievement of the Christian character.

There are, first of all, the great classics, which are often praised but little used in the work of the modern church. With one exception, we are not inclined to regret this fact. Such a book as Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living" would not command the attention of many busy business men to-

day, however great its intrinsic value still and however vast its influence has been in the past. Undoubtedly it does not speak the language of the present and it would be useless to attempt to revive its use. On the other hand, we believe that Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is still one of the most vital and useful books which can be put into the hands of the Christian at the beginning of his practice of Jesus' way of living. It is so beautiful in the purity of its style; the allegory is so apt and plain; the insight into the universal Christian problem is so profound and accurate! It never can be outgrown.

The preacher ought to have on hand for his follow-up a list of useful pamphlets and books which he can suggest to those whom he has reached by his message. Men like President Henry Churchill King and Dean Charles R. Brown have written books which are of great value for this purpose. The volumes by Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick may be commended without reserve. In general the preacher will refer most confidently to those books and tracts which have helped him in his own Christian life.

Establishing New Friendships

One of the critical factors in the achievement of Christian character is the friends by whom a person is surrounded as he presses on to carry into

effect his decision to follow Christ. One of the watchwords of Christian work is, "Quit the old life." And this means entering into the new life, the principal factor in which is the friends who will do so much to help or hinder in carrying the newly-formed purpose into effect. We cannot, except in rare instances, follow with our own helpful and intimate fellowship many of those who have responded favourably to the message as we have preached it. We can, however, in many instances establish new friendships for the immature Christian. In the strengthening power of these we shall often be able to follow up our message more successfully than in any other way.

Jesus was a consummate Teacher and Friend; and He gathered His disciples around Himself in order that with one another and with Himself they might come fully into the new life. Just think of what John meant to Peter and what Peter meant to Matthew! There must have been many an experience of the deepest moment which the disciples shared with one another. In the early Christian congregations which Paul gathered and built up we find him constantly emphasizing the vital value of their fellowship. He told the Galatians that, while each must assume responsibility and bear his own burden, it was only by bearing one another's burdens that they could possibly fulfill the law of Christ. These principles are as vital to

Christian work now as they were in the first century.

Therefore, when anyone comes into the Christian life under your ministry, make every possible effort to surround him with stimulating Christian friends. Try not to leave him alone to fight the hard battle which is inevitably ahead of him. You may complete your sermon in the best possible way when you have established the connection between one who has yielded his life to Christ and one or more comrades who will encourage him to fight the good fight with all his might.

Comrades of Christ

Jesus made Himself the center of the new life of every disciple. He does not live and walk among men in physical form any more. This does not mean, however, that Christ does not actually, although invisibly, ally Himself with every Christian in an inner, personal relationship, which is the supreme source of joy and power to everyone who lives by faith in Him. This is the unique and the supreme item in Christian experience. No other religion has any such privilege and power as this. Union of the disciple with the living Saviour and Lord is what makes anyone a Christian. There are countless ways in which this may be realized. It is the experience which is reflected in the New Testament words, "*Whom not having seen, ye*

love" (1 Pet. 1: 8). It is the realization of the promise, *"I in them, and thou in me"* (John 17: 23). It is confirmed by the testimony of millions of those who have known it to be true, although they have not been able to tell why it was a fact.

What, then, is the most efficient follow-up which can be carried out by the lay preacher? It is to make plain the possibility of this experience of actual union with Christ. He does come to those who love and trust Him, with joy, peace and power. It may seem that we are claiming something which is not valid in the experience of this modern commercial and scientific world; but the fact is no less real now than it was in the first century. Indeed, if Jesus were actually living somewhere on earth to-day only a few could be in personal relations with Him; but now it is possible for us all, wherever we live, whatever our lot, to admit to most intimate fellowship the living Christ. This fellowship makes us Christians. Whittier was expressing the central truth of the Christian religion when he wrote:

> "The healing of the seamless dress
> Is by our beds of pain;
> We touch Him in life's throng and press,
> And we are whole again."

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